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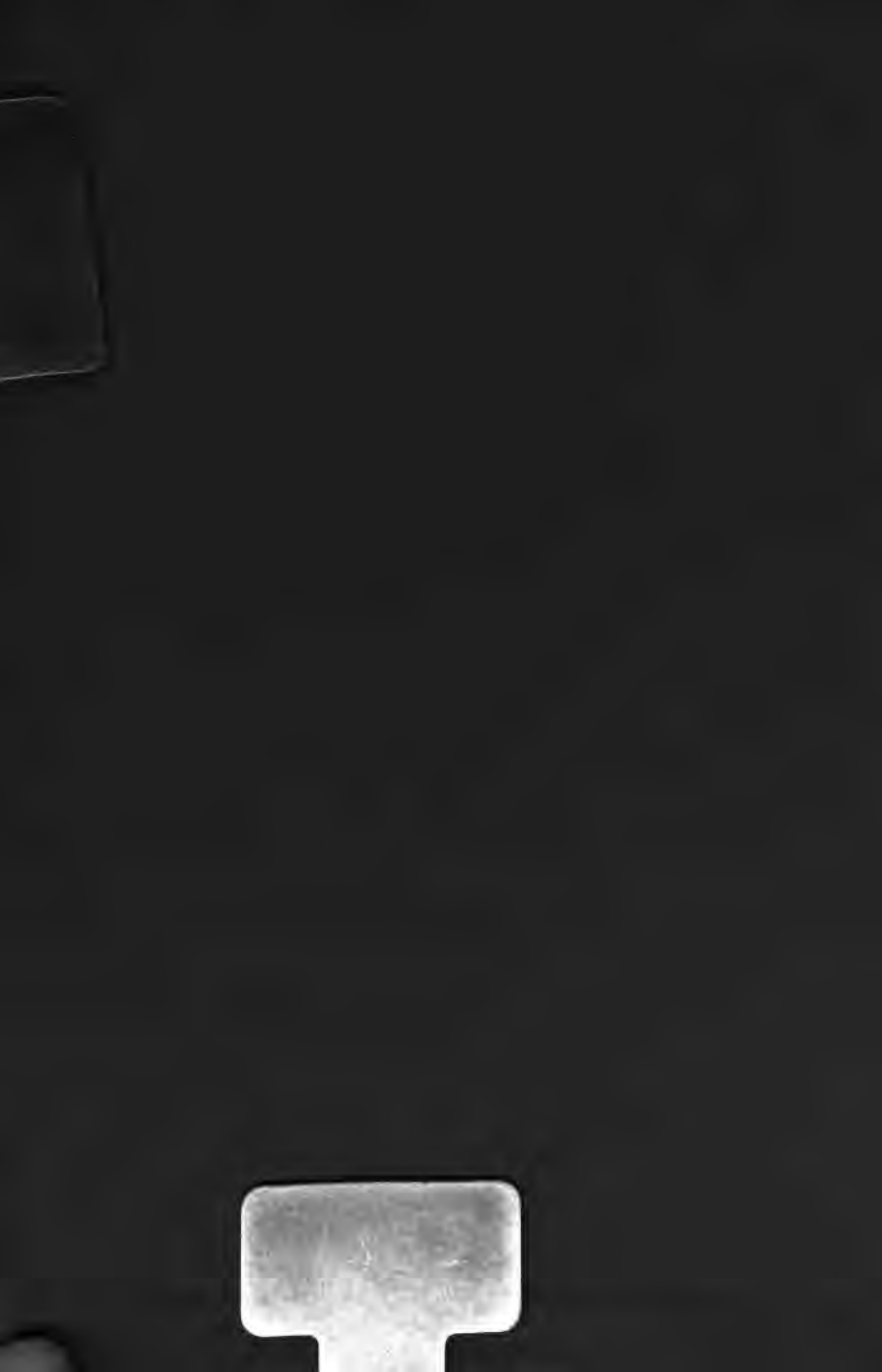
MRS JOHN KENT SPENDER



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MR. NOBODY

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF

"GODWYN'S ORDEAL," "BOTH IN THE WRONG,"
"HER OWN FAULT," "PARTED LIVES,"

ETC. ETC.

"It is amazing how small a beam of light redeems a soul from the condemnation of utter darkness."

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

"All things tend upwardly, though weak
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him—
All this I knew not, and I failed."

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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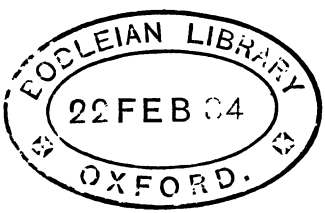
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PART I.

Can the state thrive
By the destruction of her innocent sons,
In whom a premature necessity
Blocks out the forms of nature, preconsumes
The reason, famishes the heart, shuts up
The infant being in itself, and makes
Its very spring a season of decay?
Can hope look forward to a manhood raised
On such foundations?

WORDSWORTH.

MR. NOBODY.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the latter days of December, 1829, before the seasons had begun to puzzle and discomfort agriculturists, or 'to totter,' as Rossetti says, 'in their walk.' It was a time when the months were supposed to act up fairly to their accustomed character. The Yule-log was still expected to blaze at Christmas time, and March was more associated with the daffodils, 'that come before the swallows dare,' than with the pale cheeks and red nose of youth, or the dust which brings tears into the eyes of 'reverend age.'

The Shakespearian winter, 'when coughing drowns the parson's saw,' was still said to be succeeded by the mildness of a spring in which young people were fabled to bathe their faces with dew, and to go a-maying decked in white blossoms under sunlit skies.

Yet the traditions of our fathers were already beginning to be shaken. And the nation, which was suffering from the bad effects of two uncongenial, wet summers, was ill prepared to encounter another January of extraordinary frost and snow. August and September had *not* brought the red ripened corn, the warm, sweet twilights, or the soft harvest moons; nor had the 'happy autumn fields' of October been as genial as usual, with brown nuts, ruddy apples, and touches of russet and gold.

Winter seemed to be setting-in with greater virulence than ever, and tramps and beggars —who more than fifty years ago were tolerated nuisances to such an extent that Smith, the 'king of gipsies,' was followed to his grave by a hundred children and grandchildren—must have had a bad time of it in

their wandering life. But these people were hardened from childhood to endure all sorts of changes of temperature. Not so a poor beggar-woman who, at the time of which I write, had been wandering for weeks on foot in spite of bleak winds, and over almost impassable roads, with a patient, careworn face, and a pathetic, heavy-laden expression like that of an over-driven dumb animal in its silent misery, which attracted more than one passer-by.

When she had set out on her weary walk from the neighbourhood of London, her shoe-leather and bonnet and shawl had been in fair condition; but now the shoes hardly held together, and her shawl—torn here and there in strips—scarcely protected her emaciated person. The little that was left of the once efficient garment was wrapped in folds round the baby which she clutched close to her breast, as if she would communicate to it the small amount of warmth which yet lingered in her own body; and the bonnet, which was so draggled as no longer to protect her head, revealed her unkempt hair, which had once been arranged in

the fashion of the period, in loose, full curls, falling on either side of the face, and only parted to show the forehead and eyebrows. The forehead was already furrowed, though the woman was still young, and the large, restless eyes glanced nervously at the clouds which were being driven across the sky by the pitiless wind that tore at the chimney-stacks of the cottagers, sending clattering slates from the roofs of the houses, as she passed through the village.

Now and then she begged an alms, and it was the poor who gave her from time to time of their broken victuals. She was in search of a cottage which she had left in her innocent girlhood in the neighbourhood of a town in ——shire, and which for the purpose of my story shall be misnamed Torringmoor, and she was beginning to despair of ever reaching it. She could not tell herself how she had lived through that walk of nearly two hundred miles. It seemed to her that she had walked day and night, eating from time to time the dry crusts which the pitying poor, so kind to each other, spared from

their own need. She would have lain on the ground had it been summer weather, but, as it was, she took shelter in sheds and outhouses. She had wandered from village to village singing for pence. Sometimes she had been hospitably received, and sometimes she had been driven away from the farmers' houses with curses.

It must be acknowledged that the farmers had some reason for being afraid. Tramps were sometimes in league with housebreakers then as now; and when it was not an uncommon occurrence for men with bludgeons to enter the premises of a farmer, bruising and lacerating his servants, and decamping with all the provisions on which it was possible to lay hands, the dread of tramps was not unfounded.

Even in London a lad had but lately been promised a gratuity for discovering a cave within the iron railings of Leicester Square, in which six or seven sturdy beggars had been accustomed to crouch, smoking their pipes, upon a stone which concealed a number of convenient housebreaking instruments.

So ignorant was the poor mother of the district through which she was travelling that more than once she retraced her steps. But always a sort of instinct taught her to avoid companionship. If she could get out of the highway, she preferred the cart-track in the fields, or the path in the copses. More than once a merciful waggoner had offered her a lift, but she invariably had refused by a shake of the head. Perhaps she was afraid she would have to join in conversation as a return for his hospitality, or perhaps she was aware that even hospitality itself might not be safe. It was possible that she might have heard the tale of how a waggoner lately travelling with goods had been attacked by three fellows in smock-frocks, who knocked him down, severely beating him before they stole his packages, and terrifying to death a young woman who had been in the waggon during the affray.

More than once she had been asked, 'How old is your little boy?' But she had never said, 'Six months.' If she did not exactly resent the inquiry, she seemed not to hear it,

and only answered it by hugging him closer to herself. Once or twice, the people who passed had joked about it, making coarse jokes, but she did not seem to hear them, except for the somewhat savage expression which crossed her face as she walked on again, almost barefooted, digging her nails into her own flesh.

All the heroism of which she was capable was owing to the fact of being a mother. Were it not for her child, she would have been a poor, helpless thing, and would long since have sunk down on the ground to die. But as she passed by the happy homes of the rich, with their splendid evergreens, grassy slopes, and holly-trees glistening with the hoar-frost—the ideal old homes for Christmas merry-makings—contrasting strangely with the 'dog-hutches' which were considered to be good enough for the poor, she felt as if she herself was one of the broken shards of ruin only fit to be cast into waste places, to add to the useless rubbish-heaps which no sanitary commissioner as yet had cleared away. Were it not

for her child, she would rather have been dead.

Often, in a state of fever and temporary delirium, she called on the names of those whom she had known in her girlhood, and for whom, in some blind way, she was searching again. And then, as the darkness came on, she would feel as if wounded to the heart, putting her hand to her side, and moaning.

That morning she had felt tolerably strong, as if she could accomplish the remainder of the way. The few people whom she passed did not know what to say to her—some of them deciding that she was mad, the shadow on her eyes betraying the sorrowful thoughts within. More than one who had met her on the road had shunned her, crossing over, and passing by on the other side. This solitary, absorbed woman—walking straight on, with her feet almost bare, on the stony roads, clasping her infant so tightly to her, and muttering at times to herself with that strange wildness in her eyes—was not pleasant to encounter on a lonely road.

'The creature is mad,' said more than one of the passers-by, with a shrug. 'No doubt she has brought her troubles on herself.'

For those were days in which the tender-heartedness of our times would have been looked upon as a false and foolish sentimentality. 'Mercy,' it was said, 'can be no relaxation of justice;' and there were certain fatal weaknesses whose criminality seemed to be so ingrained into the character that those who prided themselves on the superiority of the moral sense were ready, with pitiless cruelty, to pronounce it incurable, to be cast out, and trodden under foot. In this stern sense of duty, there remained no room for compassion for the criminal.

And though, in the middle of that day, when the unhappy tramp fainted on a doorstep, there proved to be one farmer's wife with a larger heart, who helped the swooning and suffering sister into a homestead, which was snug and neat, with a look of smiling hope, plenty and comfort about it—every ox and ass about the place sharing in the warm domestic

feeling, and seeming to know that it was well cared for—I am afraid it must be admitted that even this gentler and kindlier hostess allowed her conscience to reproach her for a self-indulgent impulse, and never stayed to reflect how Christ Himself, instead of excommunicating publicans and sinners, openly associated with them, and tried to benefit them.

'What is your name?' asked the good woman of the house, after she had given milk to the child, and had told the mother that she would kill it if she kept it out in the cold.

'I—I am not going to tell my name to nobody—I should like to be somebody else—I can't tell why God A'mighty created me,' answered the poor soul, impressed by the benevolence in the pitying eyes, while something like a sob choked in her throat.

'Hush! you have been ill—one can see that to look at you, and you will bring the fever back if you talk like that,' said the farmer's wife, involuntarily retreating a little as she put the child back in the mother's lap.

Footsteps were heard at the door. It was the men returning to their dinner.

'Cover me—hide me—don't let anybody see my face—I used to be known in these parts,' said the poor unhappy one, rising in alarm from her unusual place of luxury; and the good woman who listened to her shuddered.

An hour afterwards she went in search of the stranger, whom she had concealed in an outhouse. She found her crouched with her child in the furthest corner of the shelter.

'Why do you trouble yourself about me?' was the almost fierce inquiry.

'You be sick,' was the answer.

'It is the first words of pity—as anyone has said to me—since—my mother——' and she broke off the speech, made with but little of the ——shire accent, in an unaccustomed flood of tears.

'Ye've been in Lunnon,' answered the elder woman, relapsing into the vernacular, and noticing that the stranger was much younger than she had at first imagined.

She rose slowly, and looked in a dazed way around her.

'I will go away,' she said, taking no notice of the question. 'I am not good enough for sich as you to come near me. How far is it to Torringmoor? I can walk it quite well—I am bound for Torringmoor to-night.'

CHAPTER II.

THE afternoon had already begun to wane when the outcast set out again, nor did her hostess try to detain her.

'How much further am I?' she had asked, almost fiercely, turning away from her would-be helper, and relapsing once more into the silence which is the refuge of suffering souls.

Wandering folks were supposed to 'overlook' people's donkeys and hens, and though the very severity of the law against vagrants had a tendency to defeat itself, and the vagrants were left pretty much alone so long as they did not interfere with the farmer's hedges and ditches, the kind woman who had sheltered the wanderer in her benevolence was inwardly not sorry to see her depart.

'You be weak-like,' she said, as she supplied her with an ash stick which one of the farm-labourers had cut from the hedges, and which she thought might help to steady her steps.

In summer-time the soft downs over which she again began to wander would have been pleasant enough bathed in the evening light, but now the endlessness of the great moor, its vastness, and the immense expanse of of sky above, suggesting the infinite distance of the plain below, was wearying to the eye. She—who in old times had been familiar with this moor, watered by a river of which now the brown and turbulent water rushed over the rocky stones—would have been glad that the darkness was setting in, had not the place been haunted by ghosts and memories of the past.

Strange stories were then afloat, and were confidently believed by the superstitious, of wildernesses infested by evil spirits, the air being filled with the clash of instruments and with the noisy footsteps of demons ready to pounce upon their prey. Some of these familiar stories returned to the poor woman's memory.

The bare and denuded branches of the little vegetation about the place only added to the ghostliness of the scene, undisturbed but by the cry of a solitary water-hen, beating its wings and trailing its legs as it flew out into the evening air.

It was well for the lonely mother that her state was almost that of stupefaction, or all the strange and haunted sense of a wanderer by night—who hears the dead whisper, and can almost see them pass by white in the moorland mist—would have been hers. Suddenly she knew that she was alone, and uttered one cry —a mother's cry, instantly stifled by the effort which she put upon herself. Only the despairing could have understood her despair. It was but a few miles further to walk. She could see the smoke from the chimneys of Torringmoor, but her strength was failing her.

On she went again over dead leaves and dry branches, which crackled under her feet, tearing them and making them bleed. She took no notice of the pain; she might not even have felt it. Her eyes were fixed on the distant

horizon, on which lingered the tints of the wintry sunset—the colours of the Eternal city. It brought back faint recollections to her mind. How long since she had talked to her own mother in childish language of the gates of amethyst and pearl, how long—how very long—since she had read her Bible. Darker it grew, and her consciousness became more than ever confused. She murmured names now as she pressed the crying child to her bosom—tried to comfort and soothe it, but found she had no nourishment to give it. Yet mechanically, as if she remembered a habit of her girlhood, her eyes began to watch the darkening sky, noting a change in it. The skirts of the mists, which had begun to gather over the distant moon, were now drawn up, revealing clouds which fell away and seemed to retire for a time till the wind should arise like a giant in its fury. She knew that snow was beginning to fall by the small particles which she could feel in the darkness stinging her face. But, by the shorter cut which she had taken, she had but a few fields more to traverse, and

then she would be able to reach Torringmoor.

If only her strength had not been exhausted! She was compelled to sit under one of the hedges for a few moments, having taken the precaution to wrap the child more closely in the tattered remnants of the woollen shawl. And then, remembering the stick, she tried to assist her tottering steps by using it with one hand, and propelling herself forwards. It was rather limping than walking—limping with great strides, each one more exhausting than the effort which had preceded it, and rendered all the more difficult from the fact that the snow was beginning to fall in larger quantities. The flakes were wrestling in furious dance with the wind, which had risen as she expected, and was flinging the powdery white in blinding masses not only into her eyes and face, but into the closest casements of the cottages, so that in the morning it would be found drifted high into heaps wherever the pitiless wind had flung it.

She had reason to be alarmed. For there had been a night of snow in the preceding year

which had caused much consternation and confusion in all parts of the country, at a time when the means of locomotion were fewer and much more difficult than they are now. If the snow were to continue to fall like this, in six or seven hours the roads would be impassable, the coaches would cease running, the mail-bags would have to be brought on horseback at the risk of life; while—on some of the important thoroughfares—there might be carts and waggons buried in snowdrifts, causing an obstruction to all traffic. The chance for a solitary traveller would be desperate indeed, and in spite of the unerring instinct which the human mother shares, under peculiar circumstances, with brute beasts, she did not feel as if it would be of any use for her to fight against fate. The cruel blast of the knife-like wind seemed to cut her face almost into pieces, and every drop of blood in her body felt frozen. The child cried louder than before, and with the desperate emergency her consciousness partially returned to her, as she sang wild snatches of songs in a low voice, that it might not be terrified at other sounds.

Was it her fancy, or did the Christmas bells —for it was Christmas week—sound mingled with that blast of wind as she ceased her singing? She was at the outskirts of the town of Torringmoor, and the churches were close to her. She did not stop to think that the ringing of bells could scarcely be heard, and that the ringers would have ceased practising, as it was past ten o'clock. For to the sore-hearted mother the thought of pouring out her agony at the feet of One born of woman had come to her with the sound of those Christmas bells; and a pitying face—as of One crowned with thorns—seemed to look down at her through the blackness of the clouds.

CHAPTER III.

THE snow that night did not prove to be so serious as had been expected. So furious was the rush of wind, when once its power was thoroughly stirred, that the common people said it had 'drev the snew awaa.'

So it seemed to a middle-aged nurse, who was watching that night in the chamber of another young mother, listening to the tumult of winds round a house in one of the poorer streets of Torringmoor. The woman, who was about forty years old, but who looked older than she was, was urging flakes of fire up the chimney with an enormous pair of bellows.

There was an expression in her face like that in the face of a good but rather sulky dog,

with whom the world has not gone straight, and who loves but one thing in it, and that a master or mistress whom he is likely to lose. And the young lady who lay in the bed—for, in spite of her sickness and the poverty of the place, she was unmistakably a lady—had spent a portion of that night with both her arms passed round this faithful creature, relieving her overcharged heart in weeping on her neck. She saw that, though her nurse returned her caresses by stroking and petting—much as the dog, in the same case, would have put out its tongue to lick—there was a strange look about her, and that the eyes, generally good and loving, shone like live coal.

One might have said that, if the intelligence had been high enough to allow of the nurturing of any far-seeing project, there was vengeance in the face, and vengeance of a kind to be dreaded. But, however that might be, there was certainly nothing but love and gentleness in the countenance of the young lady, whom the woman had nursed since her childhood, and to whom she had returned now that all others

had deserted her. Though the patient had wept that night on her nurse's neck, hers was naturally a buoyant temperament. She had not been one of the overthoughtful ones who find it hard to rejoice when tales of real suffering are rife, and when they can only stand by, with folded hands, and watch the apparent triumph of evil over good.

Hers, on the contrary, had been a happy, childlike temperament—never perplexed and wavering, and never liable to depression. A bright and cheerful sense of duty would have made duty easy to her, even when it seemed hard to others. And though this was what the doctor had said would probably be her last night on earth, though her dearest wish remained still ungranted, and in nurse Elspeth's eyes she had endured one of the cruellest of wrongs, she could still be confident and hopeful. She was one of those who have passed from life to death because they love in a sense which others cannot comprehend, and because their love is stronger than death, and can conquer all wrongs.

Had it been her lot to live, she would have sought to lighten the troubles of others instead of brooding over her own. But the Master had not given her so hard a lot. She had suffered enough for one so sweet and patient in her short, trustful life, and now the Master, who had reserved the crown for the brows so young, which had borne but a few of the thorns, was calling for her. She was listening for the sound of His feet, and the sweet, almost unearthly smile upon the face which had succeeded the fit of weeping, and which was so incomprehensible to the lower intelligence of the servant, told that she was already conscious of it.

'Nurse, dear,' she said, presently, in a tone which, though weak and faint, could have made a bystander comprehend how, in the days of health and strength, she had possessed, besides her physical beauty, and the *naïve* grace of her slightest gestures, a childlike intonation in her voice, with a fascination in her smile which it could not have been easy to resist—'nurse, dear, I do—not think—he will come now; he

said—he—would be here before to-night. I am sure—it is not—his fault.'

The nurse, who was a north-countrywoman, did not speak loud enough for her charge to hear, but muttered to herself, 'She was a fule to think he ever would come.' She did not let her young mistress see her face, but relieved her anger by making greater efforts with the bellows, lashing her indignant feelings into a still greater height of fury as she remembered the hated face of the man who was mentioned, with long falling moustachios, which few people wore then, and which, it was the nurse's impression, were probably worn with the intention of not letting the diabolical nature of his smile be seen beneath them.

'T' puir crater,' she muttered to herself; and then, rocking herself backwards and forwards, she groaned, 'Think o' yer sowl,' till a blast of the pitiless wind blew down the chimney, and made her shudder.

'I do—think—of it—Elspeth,' said the gentle voice from the bed, 'though—I—may not tell you—all. It will make no difference—now.

You must let—me—speak to you. This is the week when God removed—the gulf—between me and Himself—when He became flesh like my little baby here—when He was seen—and handled—born of the Virgin Mary. Do you—think—I would deceive—you—though—I may not—tell you—all?'

There was a pause. The nurse did not answer. Only yesterday some of the servants of the man who owned the moustache, and who was still so mysteriously absent on his travels, had spoken of the marriage as an impossibility, and had laughed her to scorn on the subject. She knew that the doctor thought the same, and who was she to flaunt her opinion in the face of her betters? The world was as bad as possible—it could not well be worse. She believed in her 'young leddy,' but felt confident, at the same time, that the poor lamb had been deceived. One peep at her wedding lines would have been better than all this talk; and, if her suspicions were not correct, why could not her nursling show her the proofs?

There was silence in the room. Elspeth,

who had risen from attending to the fire, was now feeding the little boy, a baby of some five or six months old. An outsider might have noticed that she eyed it askance when the sick lady was not looking, as if it were the enemy rather than the child of her mistress. From time to time she muttered to herself, in a voice too low for the invalid to hear, 'He's noan coomin',—'Chap to coom at my young leddy,'—'Sich careless craturs,'—'But he'll be soa allus,'—'Not coomin', not he, and t' puir sowl nobbut just deeing.'

She did not see the smile which shone brighter on the face which lay upon the pillow, so bright at times that it seemed to illuminate the room. Exhaustion of body had subdued the lady's power of speaking, but not of recollection, not of prayer. She seemed again to hear her lover pleading.

'I cannot help it if I love you past all compass and description. The love is as a thing outside myself; I could not help it if I would. They always wanted me to be married to a rich woman—the fortunes of our house required

it, they said. Cannot you pity me when I tell you they would like me to make a marriage simply as a business partnership, without one reference to the impulses of the heart? They would like me to give up one of the sweetest and prettiest of girls because a sum of hard cash cannot be handed over to me on the day of my marriage. It is that which makes a coward and a fool of me. But, my darling, after we are married, properly married, I will outwit them. I will go away and make a fortune, and bring it back with me; and meanwhile you must keep our secret, or the whole thing will be a failure.'

She never thought of reproaching him, even in her own mind, for the fact that he had been absent for so long a time that she had pined and died without him. It was characteristic of her that she told herself he had nothing to do with the catastrophe, since there was consumption in her family, and she would probably have died anyhow. There were times when she had not even missed him, with the dim dawning of a mysterious other love which made her feel

brave with the strength of motherhood. She looked at her baby with a yearning look. It had fallen asleep. The whole room was very quiet now. For the wind, which earlier in the evening had howled down the chimney, shaking the bare trees and stripping them of the few russet autumn leaves which yet had remained upon them, had now sunk, like her little child, to sleep, and the nurse had told her that the snow, which a couple of hours before had been driving thickly outside, had also ceased.

All was quiet save for the dropping of an occasional ember in the fireplace, and from the shutterless window the dying woman could see some of the thousands of worlds taking their places again in the sky—where perhaps there were schools for the souls of those who should attain the resurrection.

A sense of the wonder at the new and grander life seemed to be gently opening before her. The only trial for one so loving was to go forth to it alone. She spoke rather to herself than to the nurse, when she said, a little languidly,

'I sometimes wish I could take my baby with

me. But that would be selfish—his father would want him.'

What if, when her child was waking in one world, she would be waking in another—that was the more likely? She felt very feeble, very care-worn, going in the path of darkness which her Saviour had trodden before her. Had He not told her, 'I go to prepare a place for you?' Perhaps in one of the many mansions which she could see now in the sky? She spoke more feebly.

'Nurse—when—I am gone—take the baby away—at once—this is no place for him—take him to his—father's house. I could not tell you—the reason—while I was living—but when —I am gone—you will find—it out. Take him—he is the heir—to the housekeeper's room —and undress him—the morning—air—will not hurt him. When they see it—they will acknowledge—him. Promise me, promise.'

Elspeth gave her one rapid, searching glance, and concluded that she was wandering. The more so because she said, a few minutes afterwards,

'I feel—just—as if—I were a child—again, hardy—and scampering—over the heather—on —the moor. Open—the window, and—let me —breathe the air.'

The older woman humoured her by pretending to let in the cold air, and shutting it out again directly, in the same spirit in which she would have given any number of required promises.

Yet she was a little awed in spite of herself by the rapt expression in the happy face which did not seem like that of anyone dying. Something in the manner in which the wide open, lustrous eyes gazed through the window, which she had begged to have opened, at the stars now shining in the sky reminded the nurse of the joyous childhood to which she had just alluded,

> 'When on some gilded cloud or flower
> Her gazing soul would dwell an hour.'

'T' puir bairn wur allus a gowk,' she muttered again to herself, shivering a little, partly with superstitious fear, and partly with the cold, as she noticed the unusual expression in the shining eyes, which seemed in no way to

notice either herself or her child, but to look through them and beyond them in a manner which alarmed her.

She would have been surprised if she could have been told that her young lady was absorbed in prayer—not the sort of prayer to which she had been accustomed herself, consisting mainly in groans and guttural noises, but in that leaning of the faithful and loving soul upon the Everlasting Arms which are beneath it, which from the habit of a lifetime passes in hours of weakness beyond the meaning of words, and even beyond the need of them, and yet realises the Divine Nature in the most perfect way, acting in its uttermost necessity upon the human.

'I cannot pray for myself; I am so weak. I have forgotten the words,' the invalid had complained but a few days before.

But now God Himself seemed to be teaching her that the essence of prayer was purely spiritual, the appeal from spirit to spirit for inward light and quickening help, the coming of the child, by a conscious act, into the merci-

ful Father's presence. Even the nurse herself seemed to be suddenly conscious of the opening of a larger window, than that which she had sulkily pretended to open, to the supernatural, though she could not have guessed that just then, if her eyes could have been opened like those of Elisha's servant, she would have discovered herself to be the least and most insignificant of the numerous presences in that poverty-stricken room. Suddenly the invalid stretched out her arms. The smile, which melted into an unconscious but muttered 'Abba, Father,' still more lit up her face.

'Oh! Elspeth, do you not *see?*' she cried, in a stronger voice. 'They are here—all of them—— Come, Lord Jesus—I——'

She could not finish the sentence. The colour which had suddenly flushed it crept from her face. But the smile still remained. It was Life—more abundant in the fullest sense—which we so ignorantly call by the name of Death. The sentiment of immortality—the conviction that that which we call the 'last act' does not end all for us, but is really a new beginning of which not

only the New Testament, but our own heart and reason assures us—became overpowering to the more limited intelligence of the looker-on, with a strange and weird conception of the possible fact that the mistress who lay there smiling, in her new, mysterious, frozen beauty, might perchance have the power of punishing her, if she did not obey her behest directly.

She did not like to think much about death herself, but had an idea that her sweet lady, who had wronged no one, had been somehow badly treated, not only by her fellow-creatures, but by the messenger which had so suddenly come for her, and which did not seem to her to be God's gentle ministrant, tenderly sealing the bodily eyes in His holy slumber, while gentler angels carried the rejoicing spirit to that Paradise described of old in metaphoric speech as 'Abraham's bosom.' Rather was it something horrible, to be struggled with and resisted, and, had it not been for the pride which kept her quiet, the angry woman would have liked to rend the air with her cries, in-

forming her neighbours, after the manner of her more savage ancestors, that Death had been let loose upon its ravages.

But there was no time to be lost. She had first of all to perform the last sad offices for her dear one, that no one should despise her as she lay there, so mysteriously smiling, but still undoubtedly maltreated before her time by the enemy; and then she had to carry out the promise—which she was rather glad than otherwise had been exacted from her—and to get rid as quickly as might be of the hated baby.

CHAPTER IV.

THE daylight had scarcely penetrated into the little house when Elspeth shuffled as quietly as possible down the wooden ladder which led from the little chamber. She wished to accomplish her mission as rapidly as possible, and to return secretly before the other people in the house could discover what had happened.

The most gloomy evening imaginable had been succeeded by a resplendent morning. The bells which rang out in Christmas week were already ringing again, after an interval of silence—now in a hallowed and consecrated strain, and now again in a merry din, only suitable for a time of human festivities and gladness. Elspeth could not have told the

names of the hymn tunes which were chiming, and awakening no responsive chord in her heart, but she knew that the burden of them was 'rejoice evermore,' and to her they sounded like a mocking injunction, when all that she cared for in life seemed to be in ruin and collapse.

The river in the neighbourhood of Torringmoor was frozen. It was an unusual occurence, and she knew that on the following evening there was to be a scene of holiday-keeping, when a number of men would be balancing themselves on steel blades, by the flare of torches, and amidst the jocund laughter of those who would be sure to detect the awkwardness of the natives. And, though the women did not then trust themselves to be whirled about on skates, there would be plenty of amusement for the fair sex.

Elspeth could imagine the bustling crowds upon the banks of the river, the pedlars selling articles of food and dress, and more than one charlatan willing to turn a nimble penny.

Already there were tall young fellows busily

sweeping the ice, and hanging lamps between the ribs of the skeleton trees.

But all the kindliness in the woman's heart had been poisoned. She turned with a sickening sensation of envy from the thought of the happy actors and friendly spectators in the merry scene. Had not her young lady as much right to enjoy herself as the best of them? The despair and contempt which never yet cured any grief were in the faithful, unreasoning creature's heart, with all that tendency to querulous fault-finding, all that distress and bewilderment at things difficult to be understood, which, in a more modern stage of development, have contributed towards the making of many a poor uneducated *petroleuse*.

Elspeth had received few kind words and few encouraging smiles during her somewhat hard, dry life, and these had come from her 'young leddy,' who, she was ready to conclude, had been too good for this earth. And there was now no one to teach the embittered, broken-hearted woman that to dwell on the melancholy hopelessness of some aspects of

human life, and not to believe side by side with it in the loving mercy of a God, is to be dragged down to the misery of a suffering brute.

The passion which possessed her had set her usually sallow complexion in a blaze, and she was ready to stamp her foot as she remembered that that evening, when the men and commoner people would be amusing themselves on the ice, a splendid ball would be given in Torringmoor, at which all the beauty and fashion in the neighbourhood would be collected, and in which the merry dance was to be kept up to a late hour, with every luxury and delicacy of the season, so that the New Year should be ushered in with heart-felt glee. A number of fine ladies would be visiting in the neighbourhood for the purpose, and the woman cursed them in her heart.

'Ech th' owld warld is jest so ill, it wur better it wur doon wi' a'together, it nubbut graws wurser,' she said to herself, in a mixture of her own dialect, and her young lady's southern speech, little knowing that such sentiments would in the future be honoured by the name

of 'pessimism,' and that philosophical ideas, bearing a remarkable resemblance to her own dreary lament, would fall glibly from the lips of weaklings who would like to be thought wise in depreciating human life.

She gave a long, searching look at the infant, and began more than ever to realise how impossible it would be for her to take the child to the big mansion in the neighbourhood, from which the master, the only nobleman of whom Torringmoor could boast, was now absent on his travels. The common sense on which she prided herself had always convinced her that her young lady told an incredible story, and that the 'proofs' of which she had spoken would prove to be a delusion of the poor girl's sick fancy, whilst she herself would be hunted from the lodge-gates with insult for venturing to speak of the reputed father.

Sheer fright of the dead body had for the time overpowered Elspeth's usual fair share of wits, but her sense of the absurdity of the situation seemed by degrees to be returning to her in the clear, keen, morning air. There

would be a ghastly make-believe, a forced joke about the thing, which would lead not only to cruel observation, but to cynical satire from the very men-servants of the establishment. True, her lady had told her to inquire for the housekeeper, and to seek for the *proof* of the child's birth in the housekeeper's private room. But the distinction of rank in a servants' hall, the artificial demarcations imitated from masters, would quite preclude such a proceeding. Elspeth was poorly dressed, the housekeeper would spurn her and snub her.

Hitherto Elspeth had been walking very slowly. There seemed to be growing upon her a sort of progressive 'locomotor ataxy,'—the doctor's gorgeous name for failure to direct one's own steps—both in the physical and the moral sense. But suddenly, as she perceived that she was nearing the nobleman's park, the remnant of her courage deserted her, and she fled. Fled, scarcely knowing or caring where her footsteps might take her, towards a barren upland strewn with boulders, where a few of the poorer folks, washerwomen and others,

were known to congregate, to pick up a scanty living; for they were close upon the moors, and this suburb was well suited to the drying of linen.

A dreary, desolate place it was, gleaming just now with the cold gleam of snow, which had fallen earlier on the previous night, and had collected here and there in heaps. The wind would be shrieking and moaning here when it had ceased to shriek in other places, and it had risen a little now, and seemed to be playing with a few of the scattered flakes, and rushing along with them against their will. A dog, a shepherd's colley, whined pitifully, following Elspeth, as, for reasons which she could not have given, she passed on with the baby, which was cooing, and even attempting to make more articulate sounds, so delighted was the little fellow with the change from the sick-room.

Elspeth scarcely knew whither she meant to take him. She had no respect or sympathy for the bright little creature, whom his mother had so ardently loved, as a fresh link from the

chain let down from heaven to earth from the ever-working Spirit. Elspeth, as a pessimist, was only reminded by the little one of the short time that the joy of many mothers lasts, when the babies they love are either parted from them betimes, or live to grow up in a separation of heart which is often worse than death. She remembered that the mother had said she wished it had been possible for her to take the child with her.

Elspeth, who had so loved her, re-echoed the words, as, scarcely noticing what she was doing, she followed the dog, which, alternating its whine with short deep barks, seemed to be leading the way somewhere, she did not care where. Yet she could not help remarking that the animal seemed to have its nose close to the ground, and that in the direction in which it led there were footprints in the snow, as if some one else had tramped that way before her.

The dog's whine became more eager, and at last it stood quite still before a large and desolate-looking barn, the door of which was ajar.

Elspeth pushed it more widely open, her mind still in that strained state, and so fully occupied with keeping back its own woes that she troubled herself little about any other grief which was foreign to her own private source of sorrow. But she could not help noticing that, in a sitting posture under the shed, and upon a heap of dirty straw, another woman sat with another child in her arms, and that the child was pressed closely to her bosom, as if she too would protect it from the cold. There was need to do so, for it was freezing hard, and an old neckerchief, more like a rag, which lay at this other woman's feet, was stiff and frozen.

'What a to-do the creature was making! It was no worse for her than for others, and many wanderers must have been homeless that dreary night,' was the first selfish thought, as Elspeth noted the coincidence. But her next idea was one of horror, for, on calling to her fellow-sufferer, the latter did not seem to take notice. Her attitude was easy and peaceful as that of a child asleep, but, on closer inspection, it was

evident that she and the baby in her arms were dead.

To do Elspeth justice, she was not quite destitute of feeling, as she took off her own cloak, and tried to pile it on as clothing, hoping that the warmth might help to restore vitality. But such an event was too common an occurrence, in days when the sufferings of the poor were thought to be no one's particular business, and when Christian benevolence had not taken the more active forms which it now so commonly assumes. It was easy to see that what had happened was nobody's fault, and that no one could take in such a wretched creature, not feeling sure of what she might be up to. Easy, too, to surmise that, when the snow had whirled about her during the night, she could not have been able to find her way blindfold, and might have been bewildered as to landmarks. But, though the Yorkshirewoman had no poetry about her, it struck her with some pathos that the Eternities, as Carlyle would have expressed it, which had looked down on the sons of Time during the preceding night, should have wit-

nessed the death of two poor mothers of boys of much the same age, and resembling one another.

Both the children were of about the same size and complexion, while the hair of both was brown, and both had that vague indeterminateness in the other features characteristic of baby-life in general. What a good thing it would be if both were dead!

The thought had no sooner occurred to a mind capable of strong emotions, explosive passions, but with a want of sufficient principle to resist bad suggestions, and hardly able to exert any form of self-control, than it was followed by another thought with the rapidity of lightning. How the poor outcast got into that shed was altogether a mystery, and was likely to remain a mystery for all the pains that people took to inquire into such things. The infant in Elspeth's own arms was now crying with cold and hunger. A little more would suffice to kill it, and it was not *her* fault that it had been taken out according to its mother's suggestion. Appearances would

be all in favour of the plan which seemed to be suggested to her by Providence itself.

She did not wait to parley with temptation, but, hastily stripping the infant in her arms of its somewhat handsome cloak and embroidered upper garment, she placed it in the arms of the dead woman, and—noticing that fortune seemed in every way to favour her scheme, since the underclothes of both children were more or less ragged, from the want of means, which had forced her to part with some of her lady's baby-linen—she dressed the dead child in the warm cloak and long embroidered dress, wrapping the other up as closely as possible in the woollen, though ragged shawl.

No one else but herself had ever looked closely at her mistress' child; no one but the doctor and the landlady in whose house they lodged had ever been allowed to come at all near to it, since not a breath of scandal that the servant could prevent had ever been suffered to cross the threshold. Nor did her conscience reproach her much as she fed the

living baby once more with some soft cake, which she had carried with her for the purpose, and noticed that a little colour crept into its cheeks. Such religion as she possessed—a bitter form of Calvinism—had made her a fatalist; and reasoning with herself that, if it were the Lord's will, some neighbour entering the barn would surely save the child's life; and, if it were not His will, her lady's wish would be granted: she placed the little one in the dead woman's arms, and, regardless of its frightened cries, once more fled.

CHAPTER V.

HAVING once yielded to a sudden temptation, there was not only no going back for Elspeth, but no time to be lost in conscientious regrets, even had such regrets been likely to occur to her. For I must ask my reader to remember that this woman had been reared in a comparatively remote period of the century, when such things as school-boards were unheard of. She had associated with 'factory hands,' whose instincts were somewhat savage, who were utterly unable to read and write, and who, some of them, as in Moslem countries, not only regarded women as marketable commodities, to be beaten or kicked in the absence of cock-fighting, bear-baiting, or other soul-stirring

amusements, but thought that mothers, in the absence of their proper lords, had more or less absolute rights over the persons of their offspring. Probably, in spite of the slight amount of Calvinism which had been grafted upon Elspeth's otherwise heathenish creed, an ethnologist of the present day would have looked upon her with interest, as a 'survival' of the untutored childhood of the nineteenth century, just as the stone axe is a relic of pre-historic times.

Had any tender and pitiful remembrance of the terrified child, screaming and stretching out its little arms to her, been likely to linger in her fierce bosom, it would have been extinguished by the sight of two pretty, smiling women, who were tripping from the steps of one of the houses to get into a closed coach, as she came back into Torringmoor. They were apparently about the age of her own young 'leddy,' and the contrast struck her cruelly, as she listened to their light laughter. One had on a dress-hat of pink satin, ornamented with ostrich feathers. Her pelisse and

tippet were trimmed with marten-skin; a Chantilly lace veil was drawn over her comely face, and her little feet peeped in and out 'like mice' in her fawn-coloured boots. The other had a walking-dress of light cashmere, quite unsuitable to the weather, as the corset displayed a cambric chemisette, only half hidden by a chinchilla tippet—sleeves *à la Caroline*, as they were then called—and pale-lavender gloves.

I fear that Elspeth cursed them in words which it would not do to retail here, not only from the recollection of another stiff white toilette on a fairer form in an upper room, but because the money which had been spent on their 'fal-lals' might have saved the taxes spent on such articles as sugar, candles, and soap, taxes which were severely felt in such a period of distress.

The hate in her heart seemed to aid her natural shrewdness. What had these Jezebels to do with such worldly vanities in this life which was so full of death; when but one of their expensive fur or feather dainties, sold for what it could fetch, would have helped Elspeth

to purchase dainties for the sweet soul which had been left to die? She clenched her hand and ground her teeth, being in that frame of mind which made her thankful for that which her minister had told her would be the fact, that God would burn up this miserable world, and she hoped He would burn it as soon as possible.

She had no one but the doctor to outwit now, and her natural shrewdness told her that would be pretty easy, since the distress had been so great among country practitioners that many of them had been unable to keep their families, and were embarking for America and the settlement on the Swan River. The doctor who attended her poor lady had had difficulty enough, as Elspeth knew, to provide sufficient food for the mouths of his own children. One death, more or less, from exposure to cold, amongst the common slaughter of innocents from causes which were preventible, would not, as Elspeth knew, be likely to attract much attention.

And, though she had her tears and lamenta-

tions ready, she did not suppose that too much attention would be accorded to her trouble as she stopped at the doctor's shop, where the blue and red lights had been burning all night. The most benevolent of all professions had not then learnt to be afraid of lowering itself by allowing the common people to call its dispensaries 'shops,' nor did it shrink with horror from defiling itself by having anything to do with exchange and barter.

As she had expected, the doctor was not too sympathetic.

'What? the mother was dead, and the child sick a'ready, and yet you took it out in the cold morning air—what a fool you must be!' said the young man, whose assistance she thought it wise to seek, as she told her plausible tale, and he also told her how senseless it would be to try to restore life by inadequate means, for the boy had been evidently dead more than an hour already. 'And the best thing that could happen, too, though that does not excuse you for your atrocious carelessness, woman,' said the young man, as he somewhat roughly un-

fastened for the second time the cloak and dress, and in so doing dislodged a tiny parcel of something which had been sewed into the bosom of the little dress, and which fell down at Elspeth's feet. She coloured slightly as she picked it up, and thrust it into her pocket, determining to examine it at leisure when she reached her home.

In spite of her nervousness she was somewhat angry with the doctor for his haughty, repellant manner, and resented the fact that such a manner was reserved for the 'tag-rag and bobtail,' whilst he could be suave enough to the 'quality,' and was not above the snobbishness which made him think it a possible stepping-stone to a fortune to have a right to feel the pulse of a lord, or prescribe for a duchess.

'There, don't stand blubbering there any more—my time is precious, and a mistake of this kind can't be undone,' he said, impatiently.

What could the fool expect of him? he had enough to do to attend to the living. And, indeed, when medical science had still to make such strides that the idea of inflating the lungs

of still-born children was spoken of as a curious experiment only attempted by Paris savants, and problematical in its results; when anonymous letters had sometimes to be written to mayors and coroners, before a jury was summoned to investigate mysterious deaths; and when itinerant vendors or other unfortunate men could be discovered dead, with their skulls fractured, and jurymen trouble themselves so little about their fate that, from want of evidence, they were content to bring in, as their most decisive verdict, 'Found dead, but how or by what means cannot be determined,' Elspeth need not have feared that there would be much ado about a baby's death.

Meanwhile the little one, which had been so heartlessly abandoned, was not so forsaken as it might have seemed to human ken. Doubtless its guardian angel was watching over it; and without speculating as to the true meaning of old-world myths, such as that of Romulus and Remus, there was certainly another angel at hand in the shape of a four-footed brute.

The dog—of whom we are ready so hastily to assume that it is soulless, because we know nothing about the nature of its soul—proved itself in this case, as in many other cases equally well authenticated, to be kinder than a specimen of degraded humanity. It was anxious, though excited, as a mother might have been, keeping, as it were, one eye upon the door of the barn that it might watch what was passing outside, and another on the child, which at intervals it endeavoured to amuse by wagging its tail and barking.

I am afraid that this latter kindly mark of attention, which involved some expenditure of strength on the part of the faithful animal, was scarcely needed in this instance, as the child had hardly reached that stage of existence which would have enabled it to appreciate such courtesies. A partial mother might have declared it was 'taking notice,' but it was fortunate for it that that 'notice,' which had reached the extent of enabling it to make odd noises when it was in Elspeth's arms in the open air,

did not render it at all uncomfortably aware of its awful companionship. Had it remained with all that was left of its mother in the strangely-curtained room, with the mysteriously-covered elevation on the white-sheeted bed, it would still have been in merciful ignorance of the spectre, Death. But in this case, after it had comforted itself with its cake, and had sucked the remnant of the crumbs from its podgy fingers, it discovered nothing strange in the near neighbourhood of an apparently sleeping face, from which the premature wrinkles had been smoothed. With the absence of instinct so characteristic of the human infant, it apparently took the face for that of its mother, and, having exhausted itself with crying, and finding the warmth of the old shawl in this protected part of the shed to be better than the cold outside, it betook itself philosophically to sucking its thumb.

From the thumb the next stage was that of taking an early siesta, a proceeding of which the dog appeared to approve. But when the nap was followed by the infallible consequence,

that of waking and becoming aware of the pangs of hunger, and when its tiny fingers, which were somewhat numbed, began to search for its mother's face, and only came in contact with what was marble cold, there was no resource but to burst into a terrified howl. The dog caressed it—otherwise licked it—as I suppose its tender predecessors caressed the dying Lazarus; but the pathetic expression in its faithful eyes deepened, as it recognised its utter inefficiency under the circumstances. Indeed, it had some reason to be depressed in spirits, being with all good-will more incapable than the fabled she-bear. The infantile howls became gradually feebler; the baby was growing weak, and the dog, sitting on its haunches, and lifting its muzzle as if in appeal, gave utterance to one of those long, lamenting, almost human whines which seemed to protest against the fate that was hovering over the child.

At that moment a woman, with a plaid shawl thrown over her head, after the manner of the Yorkshire or Lancashire operatives, was passing

the shed. She was not one of the factory hands, though, from her appearance, an outsider might hastily have concluded so. The expression of her face had nothing of that bold, unsexed, and almost supercilious stare characteristic of too many of the women employed at the Torringmoor factories. It was, indeed, remarkable for its patience and docility. It might once have been good-looking, but there was now a greyness of the complexion, a languor in the carriage of her thin, somewhat gawky figure, and an appearance of ill-health which told the tale that Mary Burton was no native of these parts, and that insufficient clothing, poor living, keen air, and the searching winds of Torringmoor were breaking down a constitution ill calculated to endure privation. She and her father had been born and bred in the neighbourhood of London, but had been unfortunate, like others, in a period of agricultural depression, when work had been difficult to obtain both in Sussex and Middlesex.

It was not in the vegetable world alone that the snows and frosts of two successive winters

were beginning to be perceptible. But, among the occupants of land in many of the English counties, there was said to be a great deal of distress. Sadness and disappointment were already experienced by those who were beaten down by the rigid nature of the laws, and seemed fruitlessly to spend their energies upon the soil. The Burtons had seen better days; but when starved women had been found in wretched habitations near Battersea literally famished, with some straw in the corners of their rooms, but no covering of any sort, old Jem Burton—who had been tempted by the account of the lace-work which was going on in ——shire, much as Whittington was tempted by fables of gold to be picked up in London—had spent his last remaining shilling in determining to take his daughter to offer the assistance of her deft fingers to the lace-workers at Torringmoor, rather than remain to starve at Battersea.

He commenced by spending his shillings on coach-fares, but, when his little store of silver was exhausted, he and his daughter were

obliged to trudge. Sanguine still, he had comforted Polly by the reflection that, if they had carried more money on their persons, rogues might have stolen it. But a short time before, as he reminded Polly, a poor working-woman had been murdered on this very road for the sake of the eight shillings which she carried in her pocket, and which she had earned by her honest toil. The verdict had been, 'Accidental death;' and Jem, who did not read his newspaper for nothing, had commented on the circumstance to his uncomplaining daughter.

They had reached the El Dorado at last, which honest Jem believed in because he prided himself on the possession of thews and muscles, and was still able enough to perform a day's work, while he believed that his Polly would be good at the lace-making. But, if labour was a little more plentiful for Jem, Polly preferred her own quiet modes of life to the gossipping, jealous, and immodest ways of some of the Torringmoor lace-makers. Rather than expose herself to be contaminated by associa-

tion with them, she had preferred to do a little washing, and to take in some sewing. And there was worse than all this, on which the woman, who never openly complained, was always secretly brooding. Her father's determination—a set purpose from which it had been impossible to deter him, but which she, with her better wisdom, had known from the first to be blind and obstinate—of coming to a strange town, had broken Polly's heart and blighted her life.

The man with whom she had kept company for years, and who was angry with her for leaving Battersea with her father, and not remaining and facing her position with him and all its difficulties, had seen her off with specious speeches and manifold promises to write to her, but had jilted her as soon as her back was turned, and had married a more comely and younger woman. Since then, Polly Burton had tried to face the future with a settled determination to make the best of a life from which she believed all the brightness had gone. She would not deceive herself, or

make friends with other people. She believed herself to have done with affection of all sorts, unless it was that for her aged father.

She was passing this shed this wintry morning with a feeling that she had outlived all tender desires. The loving flame, which had once shone so brightly in her heart, burned very low indeed; the last sparks which made life sweet to her were nearly out. And the divine love seemed to have almost gone with the human, so faint was her interest in anything which God had made, so dull and stolid her determination to plod through her allotted task, so weary her soul. She was almost angry with the people who had given her a little washing, which involved the painful task of fetching it on such a bitterly cold morning. The latter stage of existence with this woman seemed at present as if it would be worse than the former; and yet the former, in which the love in her nature had once asserted itself, and made toil pleasant to her, had left its hand-writing in that look of endurance and

docility on the sickly face, and her Father in Heaven had not forgotten her.

She was passing the shed with her head cast down, feeling like a machine, capable of so many hours work every day, and only a little wearier and colder than usual, when the child's fatigued wail struck upon her ear. Her first thought was the severe one, that it was 'all of a piece with all the other ill behaviour of these set-up hussies,' the way in which they neglected their children; but her second thought brought a stirring of some warmth about her heart, as the infant's cry recalled a recollection of her own childhood, of how carefully she used to tend a little baby sister when her mother was otherwise occupied, and how she had loved it. Her third thought, that if her life had been differently ordered she might have had little ones of her own to sweeten and beautify it, brought a sudden wave of colour to her pale, thin cheek. Then she was aware that her dress was being gently pulled by the dog, and that the colley looked as if it could almost read her secret thoughts, and answer,

'No, you are not a machine. You had once a passionate, loving nature, with a woman's longing after domestic life, for all you pretend to be made of cast-iron, and try, in spite of your ill health, to be always in working order.'

She yielded to the dog, and let it draw her into the shed, when, lo! the baby stretched out its little arms to her and wept. And, though it was a matter-of-fact and rather comical travesty of the sweet old idyll of the Egyptian princess with heart warming to the abandoned babe of the despised Hebrew slave, yet the effect was much the same with the like 'touch of nature.' In both cases the woman, in the simple language of Scripture, 'had compassion,' and in that of Polly Burton it was as if a spring was suddenly touched which hitherto had been lying dormant in her nature, revealing a fund of hidden treasure. She was, though she knew it not, emphatically a mother, though she had never brought forth a child, and motherhood in such a case is more unselfish. From the moment that she took the forsaken little one, and laid it near to her heart,

wrapping it about with her own warmer garments, pressing her lips on its lips that she might help to keep up the life in it, a new and softening influence brought about a change of feeling in her.

Her old father, Jem Burton, found that evening that he might as well have argued with a wilful little girl who had just had a new doll given to her, and only hugged it the closer when urged to give it up, as to try to remind Polly that nobody required her to burden herself with 'other folks' brats.'

'Tis a child of ill fame,' muttered old Jem, whose sturdy honesty made him feel as if he and his would be decidedly ill-treated if the Almighty did not visit the sins of other people upon them from generation to generation. His daughter refused to argue about it, knowing nothing of the perplexing and mysterious question of indwelling and transmitted evil by which the finer sense of justice has been chilled. She could not answer, because she did not know that, if there be evil in the parent, it *must* be transmitted, not by any arbitrary re-intro-

duction of ignominy into the stock of humanity, but by the natural and inevitable law which reproduces in the brain and character of the child, the inherited or acquired peculiarities of habit and thought in the brain of the parent.

'From generation to generation,' repeated old Jem, not knowing that he was dabbling in the region of metaphysics, and smacking his lips with a sense of his own superior righteousness over the text. 'Tak' my word for it, Poll, the little un 'ill be hup to no good. And if you tak' 'im, my gell, from those as by rights hought to kep 'im, it'll only be the prison or the gallows. If ee comes of gaol-birds, a gaol-bird ee'll be.'

Then the woman's heart broke out.

'Shame on yer, father! As if the Lord meant us to keep a-harpin' on that sayin', and t' forget the t'other as He comes to save the lost.'

'Ain't it 'gainst yer conscience, gell?' persevered the father, honest and ever self-sufficient, and he went on, as his fashion was, making the best of every odd moment, and chanting

an old-fashioned hymn to the strokes of his axe, as he cut up some wood which his daughter had gathered to help with the fire.

'Some folks talks of their consciences when they are fools, and of their dooty when they is downright cruel,' answered Polly, who wished her father would not sing, as he always sang out of tune, and somehow the false notes jarred more than ever with the new melody which was singing on deep down in her heart that night.

She had washed the little fellow, fed him with milk, and propped him upright with a pillow on a fragment of old rug covering the stones before the fire. And the baby cooed with delight, stretching out its podgy little fists to the fire, and making futile attempts to catch hold of one of its pink toes and suck it.

'He be blythe and bright-eyed as a young rabbit. And yet his mother was a bad 'un, and the parish 'ill hev to bury 'er,' pondered Jem, with whom the divine virtue which covers a multitude of sins did not come naturally, and was no part of his religion. 'That folks as was honest should do their best for theirsels,' was

his creed, and his head shook a good deal as he thought of his daughter's strange and unexpected obstinacy, of the injury which she was inflicting on the State, according to the man's rough politics—and Jem Burton, as a London-bred man, liked his pipe and his newspaper—by 'encouragin' o' paupers.'

The recollection of the few hard-gained earnings, which Mary had carefully tied up in a stocking, did not do much to make him more sympathetic, when his daughter, who had not the gift of speech, tried to express something which she had dimly in her mind about the Pharisees, who had their moral sense 'upside down, and thought they was a-doing right when they was all the time only a-doing wrong.' She did not venture to hint that she would have been glad to help the poor dead creature, whose pathetic face had impressed her imagination as it would certainly not have impressed it if she had only seen it in life. Help in her case would have been too dilatory to be efficient. But Polly's sympathies, since she had suffered cruelly herself, were all on the

woman's side instead of on that of the man; and as she had looked at that forsaken sister, and registered a secret vow to cherish her child, something in Polly's heart had cried out against the man who had been allowed to go scot-free, and who had robbed the wretched creature of her fame.

'I'd ha' given her shelter, and hev braved it hout wi' 'em all,' she thought, as she remembered that no one had come to the poor woman's help.

CHAPTER VI.

POLLY BURTON never regretted the exceptional fit of obstinacy which caused her, in defiance of her father, to adopt the dead woman's child. True, during that first winter, the room, which had been bare of furniture before, became barer than ever, now that there was an extra mouth to feed. But when the spring came, and the March dust was succeeded by warm April rains, Polly got out between her hours for washing, and admired, as she had never done before, the varying shades of green contributed by the larch, oak, ash, and chestnut in the pathways by the river. She put down the child to crawl when she was hanging up her clothes to dry near the moor, and she noticed as she had

never yet noticed the buttercups and primroses, because the boy crowed and tried to gather them. It was as if a new spring had come into her hitherto blank life, and as if fresh spring corn, giving promise of rich aftermath, was practically being sown in the poor dead heart.

As the first few years went on, the struggle for the necessaries of life was sometimes a little difficult. But the child, who had as yet shown none of those evil tendencies at which old Jem had so darkly hinted, was always merry as a lark, when he had apparently little to satisfy his bodily cravings.

He was naturally small and thin, and could not be otherwise than ill-clad, and looked like a lamb that had been sheared of its wool before it had grown to be a sheep. But, in spite of all these drawbacks, the lamb seemed to thrive fairly well, and Jem Burton had now an infinitely better prospect before him than he had enjoyed for the last three or four years. He was not yet free from anxiety, but could look forward to the time when the boy would help him. The period was already drawing nigh

when 'ile Jem,' as he had been dubbed by the neighbours, would be sent for his schooling, and as much learning was not considered necessary for boys who could turn an odd penny in the fields fifty years ago, both Polly and her father considered that the desired event was tolerably near at hand.

Meanwhile the family, which had been absent from Rashleigh Hall, returned to Torringmoor when 'ile Jem' was four years old. The old Sir George was dead, and the new one had come into his own, but it was rumoured that the present Sir George Rashleigh had never been the same man since the death of his first wife, while he was absent on his travels. He made no secret, after his father's death, of the fact which he had always intended to make publicly known, that he had been privately married, but that his wife and infant child had both of them died before he had received the news of the birth of the latter. It was contended on his behalf that the letter had miscarried, but it was also said that he blamed himself; and, however that might be, the fact

was certain that no one dared allude to the circumstances of his early life in George Rashleigh's presence, his temper being uncertain.

He had married again, as in duty bound, but his second wife was not much richer than the first. Rumour declared that, in a violent fit of anger, he had vowed to his father that he would never marry a woman who had money, and the same busy rumour hinted again that he married his second wife rather from gratitude than love. She was an Italian whom he had met abroad—many years older than himself—and report said that the young Sir George had been nursed by her through a fever which nearly proved fatal, and which had prostrated him when he first received the news of the death of his former wife and child. He might be grateful, but the Torringmoor people concluded of him that he was neither affectionate nor genial to the lady whom he had married or anyone else. He had now another infant heir, nearly a year old, and the decadence of ancient families, with their gradual impoverishment and consequent decline in honour, was

said to press heavily on the spirits of the young father. It seemed to be his doom, as well as that of his ancestors, to see his broad lands heavily mortgaged, and fated to pass into alien hands. Already some of the family plate was said to have gone to the collectors, and other articles of *vertu* were destined to follow in the same humiliating direction.

Some of the Rashleighs had been extravagant, but no one could account for the aggregate of money which, as the price of land had increased, had literally passed through their hands, the tenant farmers not seeming to be much richer than they who roughly tilled the soil years before. It was said that the incessant and reckless activity of self-destructive force was already beginning to be at work in the age, and old tories shook their heads.

The Rashleighs had been a handsome race, and the present Sir George Rashleigh was no exception to the rule. He was tall and well-featured, carrying his head a little forward after the manner of the Rashleighs generally.

His profile was considered by connoisseurs to be exceptionally well cut; and the Italian lady, some fifteen years his senior, was said to have fallen in love with him for his manly beauty. The Rashleighs, in the good old times, kept pretty well to the rules of life laid down by a gay poet; rules of hunting and banqueting in the open-air in autumn and summer, and of carousing by the fire in winter days. Of these traditions, George Rashleigh retained but one extravagance. He came of a hunting race, and probably the hunting would be the last thing which either he or his descendants would be inclined to give up. He still managed to keep half-a-dozen hunters, and, when remonstrated with on the subject of this outlay, he would lose his temper, and declare that—rotten as the times might be—it would be long before rents and profits would fall to so low an ebb that country gentlemen would be obliged to deny themselves the solace of their hunters.

It was somewhat before the days when merchants and manufacturers were beginning to be munificent patrons of fox-hunting;

but already there were signs that commercial prosperity might follow on the depression of the agricultural, and George Rashleigh was among the number of those enthusiasts who would rather have seen their country mansions follow in the way of the old monasteries than admit that so dire a calamity as the surrendering of sport must be inflicted upon him as a punishment for the want of foresight of his ancestors. Other modes of economy, however drastic, might be adopted, with the exception of one—that of inter-marriage with the commercial classes. In the opinion of his family, George had fallen low enough in marrying, as his first wife, the penniless orphan daughter of an old Yorkshire parson. But just as it was necessary that he should ride to cover and wage war against the vulpine race, so was there the need that he should remember his blue blood and the monumental brasses. He had angered his father by declining to marry a rich lady of title because she had a plain face, but he also inherited the prejudices which had prevented all the Rashleighs from connect-

ing themselves with the 'commercial classes,' and so re-invigorating with new blood the decaying stock, as well as the ill-supplied coffers of the Rashleigh family. He shared another tradition with his father, which enabled him to keep his hounds. That tradition was, that one might borrow, or mortgage, but never actually sell, one's estate.

CHAPTER VII.

THE motto which is usually attributed to Madame de Maintenon might have been adopted by Sir George Rashleigh—'After me the deluge.'

It did not serve to improve his temper when, on one November afternoon, he rode back from a tolerably successful 'run,' and got separated from some of his friends, to remember—as he passed from the open country into the solitary woodlands—that the 'deluge' must come on his infant-heir. The sharp frosts which had set in about the end of October had had the effect of bringing the leaves off the trees, so as to make the district through which he rode nearly as bare as in a dreary December. This was really

an advantage, as it prevented George Rashleigh from losing his way amongst the innumerable narrow 'rides' which he had to traverse in the wood after leaving the moor. But the prospect round him was exceptionally melancholy, and in his present mood he fell into a dreary reverie, from which he was startled by hearing a little piping voice, 'Gi' us a penny, sir,' not in the usual dialect of the countryside, but in an unmistakable cockney intonation caught from the Burtons, who had been in London.

George Rashleigh could not have described the odd and indefinable sensation with which he encountered a pair of bright, shrewd eyes, of the same colour as the wild hyacinths which used to bloom plentifully in the fields round Torringmoor in spring time—eyes which glittered under a brow crowned by matted, curly locks, of a dark brown tint mingled with tufts which had been bleached fair by the summer sun. The eyes and the hair belonged to a very small boy of some four or five years of age, dressed in a sort of wisp of ragged clothing, which clung to the upper part

of his person and left the little brown legs bare, except where they were covered with splashes from the brooks and country roads. There was nothing in the little imp to account for the odd mixture of feeling with which Sir George regarded him, but the child, getting no answer, and beginning to suppose that something was expected of him, tried to put his accomplishments into practice, and turned a somersault, rags and all, after the most accredited manner in which old Jem had trained him. The unexpected exploit had the effect of startling Sir George's horse, and, with one of those quick revulsions of emotion, not unusual with passionate people, the baronet raised his whip, and shouted,

'Get out of my way, you little beggar. What is your mother thinking of not to send you to school?'

Human consciousness is so complex that, if George could have analysed his feeling, he would have seen that he had almost involuntarily lashed himself into a rage to escape the softer recollections which were so oddly

associated with the child—an experience which, I believe, is also not uncommon to irascible dispositions—so strange are the mysteries of the inner life, and the conflict of evil and good in the hidden nature of a man.

The tone of his speech had the effect of arousing a similar anger in the boy, and, as soon as the man had gone, little Jem looked after him, clenching his little hands, and with ugly wrinkles on his young face.

But the baronet was a magistrate, and had returned to his native place determining to do his duty to it, and to get the people into better order, ruling them, if possible, with firmness, as well as justice. He did not see much occasion for suavity where the poor were concerned, but he prided himself on being energetic in rectifying abuses, and would have been considerably astonished if anyone could have told him that he appeared to those whom he considered to be his inferiors as the hardest of taskmasters, and that they looked upon him as a monster with a heart as hard as a millstone.

He kept little Jem in his mind, and when he

next met the boy with the woman who had acted as his mother, and who, since she had solaced herself with her scheme of benevolence, appeared to have a noble as well as a pensive face, he told Polly that the little one was old enough to be at school, and that he should not be allowed to run lazily about these rambling outskirts, with cottages straggling as if they, like their inhabitants, had no respect for law or order.

'Send the youngster to school, or he will come to no good.'

The words fell somewhat heavily on Polly's ear. They seemed an echo of the dismal prophecy hazarded years ago by old Jem. But the baronet was determined and somewhat prejudiced against the child. The fact that his reputed mother was not a native of the place, but had come from the neighbourhood of London, served to prejudice Sir George, who made no further inquiries about the boy.

And, though Polly had an unreasonable aversion to the school which had been endowed by a former inhabitant of the parish, in which

boys and girls were educated gratis—with such severity that on one occasion a poor child was said to have hidden himself in a dry ditch, and to have remained there a couple of days, from fear of being cruelly whipped for playing truant—she had no adequate excuse for not obeying the magistrate.

And now came the dismal fulfilment of the prophecy, for as soon as little Jem went to school the evil part of his nature, which had before been kept in abeyance, came to the front in an amazing and alarming manner. It was perhaps somewhat hard on him that he should no longer have been allowed to tumble about, a dusty imp, amongst the rubbish-heaps near the cottages. It was hard to be made to learn when incapacity for teaching was too often seasoned by hard words and severer blows. But harder still, according to old Jem, that a child like that should be kept to lessons, when he might already be earning something, in days when the farm labourers had only eight or nine shillings a week. Every field had its huge hedgerow, with pollards for

firing, which 'Ile Jem' could gather—a proceeding at which most of the farmers winked, so long as the hurdles were not interfered with. So little Jem's schooling meant an absence of sticks for fuel, as well as an absence of the pennies which he had hitherto been accustomed proudly to bring home as a reward for his cleverness in turning somersaults.

Polly sent him with much protest. People were more strict with children then, and did not take the same kindly notice of them as they do now; also the language which they used to them was often cruel and profane. Polly Burton was aware of this when she insisted that she 'could larn him herself, for all that such a little 'un need larn,' and further declared that she 'didn't hold to beating with a stick.' Yet it was the stick which was applied to the child's back, and that a little sharply, when, on the first day of his academic studies, he took a field-mouse in his pocket, bright-eyed and agile like himself, which raced round and round the room, to the consternation of the master. It was a bad beginning on both

sides, and 'Ile Jem,' who was uncompromising in his dislikes, made up his small mind once and for all on the question of learning. It was not that actively or outwardly he rebelled, but his spirit rose against the bullying treatment, and he hated the very sight of a book.

He would be a truant, and take the consequences of it, and I am afraid that Polly and Jem Burton often connived at this wickedness; for active of limb, frank and honest, and with a faculty for enjoying himself, little Jem was at least capable and ingenious. He had a hundred ways of making the best of it when he determined to absent himself from school, and in those days he could pick up enough to help the elder people. For the curriculum of gout and rheumatism, never likely to end in this world, had commenced for old Jem, and, as the years went on, in his readiness to help, the little fellow determined to brave the wrath of the schoolmaster and of Sir George himself, who every now and then appeared in the village, with a good many rings on his fingers, a plaid shawl about his shoulders when the

weather was cold, and a habit of kicking small dogs which got in his path, and of pushing children out of his way with a stick. Polly's foundling used to stare at him with childish wonder in his big eyes. The man's face was not feeble, but it was conceited, and the lines of temper and discontent in it could hardly be concealed. The baronet prided himself on knowing the character of almost everyone in the neighbourhood. He had set himself determinately to suppress mendicancy, and the child's saltatory tricks, as well as his cleverness in running away from school, seemed to merit reprobation.

The insidious disease, which had concealed itself so long in Polly Burton's constitution, made rapid inroads at last, and, though the boy had learnt little, it became necessary to keep him at home to help both herself and her father. But so ignorant was she, and so careless of new and somewhat necessary regulations, in her life which had glided by with little count of rules or days, that she was not aware of the infliction of a fine for truancy, which the

magistrate, in his desire to make the people grow up virtuous and respectable, had determined to enforce as a matter of regularity. As to the legality, he cared not. No one was likely to interfere with his jurisdiction. He had called a committee to assist him, and the committee had determined on this course.

It was no secret to any of them that the child, which was sometimes called 'Ile Jem,' and sometimes 'Little Nobody,' had been found a greater pickle than the schoolmaster could manage; that, when he had been punished concerning the field-mouse, the boy had next provided himself with a hedge-hog, and that often in summer-time he had been found wandering about with shoeless little feet, or sleeping on grounds in which he was trespassing, so that it had been necessary to shake him to get him awake. Such a case needed stern measures, the more so that the gentlemen were, one and all of them, by this time acquainted with Jem's history, which was no secret in the place.

Jem's mother had been a tramp, and the

nomadic tendencies were doubtless inherited. For children of the criminal classes were supposed to enter into perdition by a natural title; the curse belonging to their parents was handed on to them.

Sir George really supposed that he was eminently self-denying in undertaking a nauseous task, when, on the return from one of his rides, he reined-in his horse, and forced himself to speak to the little urchin, who had his tongue in his cheek in a manner which was certainly most abhorrent. It was a cold day, and the boy, who had been scantily fed—though he required as little for his wants as a sparrow, which could pick up a grain here and there—was looking thin and sharp-faced, whilst the colour in his usually fresh young cheeks had turned to violet edges from the keen air and want of nourishment.

'Tell your mother,' said Sir George, 'that she has a couple of shillings to pay on account of your ill-behaviour, as you have not been at school.'

The boy vouchsafed no other answer than a

rapid, somewhat significant glance. His tongue was still in his cheek—an irritating grimace. He bore more than one resemblance to the easily-satisfied sparrow. For, like it, he could be occasionally pert, though generally inoffensive. He did not believe in Mary Burton, who had no money to buy food, having to pay fines. It was not in his nature to fear, but he was a little inclined to laugh.

'The jackanapes is disrespectful,' thought Sir George, as he glanced down at the impish figure of this ill-mannered child, who shuffled his feet, but made no attempt to doff his hat.

The waif must have known well enough, as the magistrate reflected, that every well-trained youngster was expected to pull the front lock of his tangled mane when he talked to his betters. All the people round cringed to the Baronet, and Sir George could not possibly suspect that by some of the very people who cringed the most he was inwardly detested. He did not fly into a passion, but, with the conviction that anyone who gave the lad a thrashing would be doing a good work, he adroitly used the

butt-end of his whip to dislodge the hat on the impudent young head, in spite of a mocking gesture made by the child. But it seemed as if an evil spirit of mischievous glee possessed the strange waif; for when Sir George, priding himself on his self-command, shouted, in a louder tone,

'Tell her to pay it by next Monday.'

The boy shouted back:

'She hasn't got it to pay.'

And then, dodging about the while, he commenced shying tiny pebbles at the horse's legs, the smile curling the corners of his mouth as the animal began to rear.

It was the climax. Sir George, who was a powerful man, managed to soothe the horse, and then dismounted, holding the bridle with his right hand, while he grasped the boy as if he had been a puppy with his left, and, flinging him a couple of yards, began to slash him as if he were made of wood. Swish, swish, went the pitiless whip, curling round the lithe, uncovered, sunburnt legs of the little lad, but the pride in the child not only pre-

vented him from crying out, but even, for the time, from feeling.

'I will teach you to throw stones, and to answer me like that—you ragamuffin—you beggar's brat!' cried the angry gentleman, with little idea of the rage and vengeance which he was rousing in the poor boy's heart.

It was only Mary Burton who could tell, from the cut clothing and from the wheals on the child's back, that which he purposely concealed from anyone else; only she who could guess how the mind, just as it had begun to bud, was slowly withering and becoming fit for nought but bitterness.

'Oh, hush!' said the good woman, thoroughly affrighted at the clenching of the little fists and at the look of hatred which had been summoned with a dark frown on the young face, 'you will make me think that I have *spoilt* you.'

For already old Jem was shaking his head and reminding her how he had told her that the parent stock was bad, and that from an ill tree like that there could come nought but evil.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was as yet little of that precocious speculation and intellectual refining which has come in with the so-called 'march of knowledge,' and which may make it difficult to impress on the mind of the youngster of the future the danger of the violation of the Decalogue.

There was still a firm belief in the use of the rod, and it cannot be said that Sir George's conscience reproached him in the least when he felt that he had given an ill-taught brat the hiding which he deserved.

Had Polly Burton lived, the love might still have conquered the hate. But on one morning in the following spring, when the swallows

were coming home, and when the scent of flowers was on the wind, Polly was found stiff and stark, with but little enough of bed and bedding. It could not be said that she had undergone more privations than others of her neighbours. But the winter again had been a hard one, and Polly had less constitution than others to stand it. Her simple funeral was obliged to be at the expense of the parish. It was fortunate for old Jem that he was becoming a little childish, and, when he was told that the kindly heart had ceased to beat, he comforted himself by repeating over and over, with the simplicity of a child, that she had 'gone to glory,' and that his 'time,' he thanked God, could not be long. He still never did anything by halves, and though he sang out of tune with his poor old cracked voice, he took especial pains with his singing, and piped with odd recollections of old melodies about 'glory, glory,' when the funeral was over, and he was left with no other companion than little Jem in the house.

He was beginning to be afraid of the waif,

whom his daughter had taken in contrary to his approval, and rather winced when he came in contact with the child's shrewd, sharp glances. But Polly had a truer mourner in the little desolate child whose heart felt as if it would break under the burden which oppressed it.

Old Jem had a way of drowning his sorrows which Polly might not have allowed had she remained to take care of him. For, though the pothouses did not as yet outnumber the cottages, there was a convenient 'public' near at hand where the farm-labourers and operatives could get their pint of beer. 'It were a hoggish sort o' a place,' as Jem the elder sometimes declared in a fit of confidence to a boon companion when he descanted on the greater glories of the metropolis. But brandy was fortunately little drunk in it, and almost as rare as nectar. The beer was so weak that it could not do the old man much harm, and some of the neighbours—pitiful at the sight of the wreck of such a grand physique—would 'treat him' when the 'Ile Jem' was out of the way.

Meanwhile, no one seemed to care what be-

came of the child. He was left to pick up as he could a scanty means of livelihood from gathering the spring flowers, and tying them into bundles for sale. His little sunburnt figure, bare-footed, with keen face, was well known that spring to the visitors at Torringmoor. For the child had sense enough to understand that if he did not do enough to turn honest pennies, old Jem would soon be left to collapse into something worse than what Carlyle called a 'poor-law Bastille,' and, though there was little enough love lost between the two, the boy had a dim sense that Polly would not like it, and, for the sake of what Polly had done for him, he was in duty bound to support her old father. The word 'Polly' in those days comprised the whole of his religion; it was a sort of fetish to him and served to keep him straight.

'There's a deal of wickedness in this place,' Polly Burton had said to him on the day before she died. And, for the sake of the woman who had acted to him as a mother, he would run away as fast as his little bare legs could carry him when he heard other mothers

execrating their offsprings with volleys of curses up the street. He was thankful to think he had never had a real mother, if that was the way with them.

For Polly had spoken nothing but good words to him. She had left him her old Bible, but unfortunately he could not read it. And what pleased him since her death best was to get out, on the pretence of gathering flowers, to the loneliness and isolation of the desolate moor. To be there at sunrise, and to see the sun striking through the clouds and illuminating their dark edges, was always a pleasure to him, and a still greater pleasure to watch the great ball of fire throwing open the gates of heaven as it sank into rest. The mystery of interwoven foliage, and of subtle shining reflections in the pools, which suggested the neighbourhood of the river, did something also to comfort him and to speak with Polly's voice. But best of all was the time when it seemed to his untutored fancy as if invisible hands must be kindling the lights in those far-away mansions where his adopted mother had gone

to dwell. He scarcely ventured to wait to wonder if, when this solemn hour came, she might be allowed to look down upon him and help him. For the darkness brought its task, and, hastily gathering together the bunches of wild-flowers which during the day he had failed to sell, he would make his way, under the merciful covering of the gloom, to the graveyard in which they had hastily buried Polly, with the grass not yet grown upon her grave.

The graveyard was supposed to be closed after sunset. But this could make no possible difference to the agile little figure, which crept along with stealthy steps, and prided itself on climbing every sort of fence. Not only was the wall no impediment, but the child had a sense of having the place to himself as soon as the stars came out. And evening after evening he brought his bunch of wild-flowers—primroses, violets, cowslips, bluebells, and marsh marigolds, as the case might be—and piled them, as any little idolater might have heaped his offerings before a shrine, on Polly's grave, pressing his own little face on the turf-

less mound, and watering some of the flowers with tears which no one in the world would have thought he could shed. For, after he had accomplished his pilgrimage, he would return moodily from the churchyard, scowling and getting out of the way whenever his fellow-creatures tried to draw near to him.

It was scarcely in human nature that this sort of thing should continue without any change, and, after a few weeks, it occurred to the lad that his adopted mother must be tired of always seeing the same flowers. He had seen ladies who were rich with magnificent floral wreaths made of azaleas and camelias; for though as yet the Protestant feeling had decreed that it was rather an unsafe thing to take to praying over graves, lest by any chance one might be tempted to take to praying for, or even to, the souls of the departed, yet love overleaped such decrees in its eagerness to give its best.

He had heard a good deal about trespassing, but it never impressed him in the least. The farmers or the gentlemen round would have

found it as easy to catch a hare as this swift little trespasser when it pleased him to exercise himself in his neighbour's estates. He was familiar with all their grounds, and though the committee, which in time was to give place to a 'Town Council,' had lately taken to putting up trespass-boards, 'Ile Jem' could not read them, and so the trespass-boards made no difference.

Old Jem had once tried to impress upon his obtuseness that Sir George was a magistrate, and had added in his hearing,

'What was the use o' going into Torringmoor for magistrates—wasn't the gen'l'man as lived close to them one hisself, as well as the parson as cum on Sundays?'

I am sorry to say that this warning effected a very different purpose from that which it was desired to accomplish, since the child's principal wish was to spite Sir George. It flashed upon him suddenly that in the garden at Rashleigh were some rare spring flowers, with the cultivation of which the gardener had taken especial pains. There were double narcissi and

some beautiful waxy hyacinths. To pick the plants in the greenhouse would have seemed to 'Little Nobody' to be a crime. His system of ethics was a strange one, but nothing would have surprised him more than to be told that to pick a flower which grew in the open air, and which seemed to belong, as much as the stars did to heaven, if they did to anyone, would have been looked upon by the magistrate as an act which obviously required punishment.

Evening after evening, after the brilliant idea occurred to him, garlands of the golden-centred narcissus and of the creamy hyacinth appeared on Polly's grave. The depredator first of all took three or four, and combined them with the wild ones, but after a time he grew bolder. The gardener set somebody to watch, by the advice of his master; and the child was caught, with his hands full of the blossoms. Even old Jem had nothing to say for him, when he was told that the punishment would be a fine or else a term of imprisonment.

'Some of 'em holds to being conwarted,'

said the old man, over his cups that night at the 'public.' 'I was never one o' that sort, but seems to me my Polly was allus conwarted. Now this chap comes of a bad lot. I all along sed as he'd go to the gallus.'

It was ungrateful, to say the least of it, of old Jem. But the little sense which he once had was altogether deserting him. And it never occurred to him to think how he was to 'get along' when the swift-footed little rascal could no longer run by the side of the carriages in Torringmoor, holding out his bunches of wild flowers, and exchanging them for half-pence.

It seemed to the little fellow that soon everything would be punishable, when he was asked if he had seen the trespass-board, and read its directions. The comparatively small number of men and women who could read would have made most of them naturally frightened of undecipherable printed directions. But little Jem, who had not troubled himself about them at all, seemed to be only surly-tempered, and had no excuse to offer. He

never thought of mentioning the sacred matter of Polly's grave, but had somehow an idea that the angels, of whom his adopted mother had so often talked, would be equal to the emergency, and would be sure to protect him —the more so that Polly had urged it upon him with her last breath to keep honest and true and never get into jail.

The child's silence made the matter worse. His case was considered to be one of contumacy. He somehow understood that the policeman to whose tender mercies the gardener immediately handed him was a functionary of the law, and, though he felt fairly crazed when he was taken, as a matter of course, to the lock-up for the night, he had sense enough to know that he could not resist the municipal authorities, though he was, as he had been often told, in a free country. He had meant no harm. But when his pockets were searched, and the policeman seemed to think the case looked terribly grave, because they contained a pocket-knife, two stones, and a ball of string, he felt more than ever an apathy of fear, which

showed itself by grumpiness and silence. Cases, such as that of a man who had recently died in Whitecross prison for a debt of fifteen shillings, had been discussed before him, as well as that of another wretch who, for stealing two odd shoes, had been sentenced to transportation for seven years. Old Jem did not hear the newspapers discussed at the public-house for nothing.

The child was literally stupified by terror. On the following morning he was brought up to be examined before the magistrates, one of whom was a parson (and Polly Burton, who had taken her charge to the meeting-house, had failed in her duty by not taking him to church), another, who had a jerky, genial manner of speaking, but who looked properly shocked at the appearance of the little beggar, and finally, and worst of all, Sir George himself. That the form of examination was a farce, and that there was a 'foregone conclusion,' as the act was undeniable, was evident from the way in which the gardener, as witness, stated the case.

Little Jem had never before heard his char-

acter stated in plain terms. He opened his eyes wide in his accuser's face, and then literally gasped for breath. He began to forget his terror, and his natural shrewdness came to his assistance. There was an angry glitter in his blue eyes, and more than one of the gentlemen who were present could not help being struck by the shapeliness of his limbs and face, and by the fact that he carried himself erect as no cottage-bred lad ever carried himself, as he answered, saucily,

'I am not a vagrant.'

A friend nudged his elbow.

'Be wise, and hold your tongue, you young rascal,' he whispered.

Little Jem looked round. There should have been many people to speak a good word for him, he thought, people who had known him since his babyhood, and could have said that he meant no harm to anyone; but somehow or other they were not there. He was only aware of faces which looked stern and terrible, and he knew that all the evidence went to show that he had taken the flowers. His only hope seem-

ed to be in speaking for himself, as, breathing hard, with face white and scared, but looking defiantly at his judges, he cried out,

'I never begged from no one. I only sold my flowers.'

It was an unlucky speech, as one of the by-standers laughed, and said, in a tone loud enough to be heard,

'You sold what you had stolen, you young vagabond.'

'The lad is a good lad,' said a woman, kinder than the rest, and who stood up for his defence, since she, like Polly Burton, had a natural dislike to the Torringmoor people, and prided herself on retaining more cockney speech. 'You would not bracket him with thieves. A beggar in course he is, poor brat, but, saving your worship's pardon, I don't see how he can be anything else—coming, as he did, by a wrong tack into the world, and taken up by a weaksome, cranky creature, as always lived more or less on charity. He's down enough in the mouth a'-ready, without throwing o' it into his face.'

'He is a vagrant—all the mischief comes of

his vagrancy,' said one of the magistrates, severely.

'That will do, my good woman—you may step down,' answered another. 'We cannot allow uneducated people to pamper mendicancy.'

There was no other attempt made at little Jem's defence. Certainly one neighbour, who wished to magnify his own importance, pretended afterwards without an atom of truth that 'he knawed who did it; but o' course he warn't a-going to blab.'—'He'd heerd tell,' afterwards said another, 'that if folks only looked over a gate at a turnip-field, there'd be other folks ready to swear to a whole waggonfield of turnips against 'em.'

In each case it was the rustic, as usual, shutting his eyes and ears, lest he should be caught and dragged in himself by some of the wheels and pulleys of this horrible machinery called the law. More than one man and woman had come into court intending to say a word respecting the ignorance of the waif and the fact which had been guessed by them and confirmed

by the sexton that the flowers had been pulled in childishness for Polly Burton's grave. But each, when summoned to come forward, fell back like a coward on assumed stupidity, and slipped out of court.

Meanwhile, the examination, which had made the little fellow's head whirl, was quickly over, and he had to hear the sentence pronounced in this terrible judgment-chamber.

The gentleman who had the genial manner had asked him if he had anything to say for himself. But when the boy looked round and saw that the neighbours, who could have spoken in an ordinary way to his industry and readiness to oblige, were none of them there to help, he could only repeat doggedly that he did not know he might not be allowed to pick a few of the flowers.

'Then it is time you knew *now*,' said Sir George, who began to speak. And to little Jem, who listened, it somehow became plain that, because he had stolen the flowers, he might some day be guilty of any theft, arson, or murder, that the mischief was to be beaten out

of him, and he was to have twelve days' confinement with hard labour.

When he heard of the sentence, the pride which had hitherto kept him up broke down. He burst into a passion of angry tears, striking with his fists at the policeman who took him out of court.

CHAPTER IX.

It was but a very unimportant event of every-day life in the neighbourhood of Torringmoor. Old Jem had gone to the workhouse by the time that 'Ile Jem' came out of prison. No one had thought of what would become of the lad, who was more than ever 'Little Nobody,' or 'Mr. Nobody' now, as his companions, who wished to be witty, had called him. He had kept the title to himself as soon as he heard it, not knowing that it was already familiar to Polly Burton. Why should he be jeered at because he was ragged, and had hardly enough to eat?

When he went to look for old Jem, and found that he was gone, a fire of impotent rage

consumed the boy, and seemed to tear at his vitals. It was not that the old man had been particularly kind to him, but he had looked upon him as a trust, and had promised Polly to 'do' for him.

The child's life had required wonderfully little before the term of imprisonment which had branded him as a gaol-bird. A little water, a little bread, a little straw or heather to sleep on, had sufficed for his daily wants. He had risen with the lark during Mary Burton's lifetime, and had been an active, bright-eyed creature, picking up enough for his daily wants in the fields.

But prison life had changed him more than ever, bringing him in contact with fresh people. He was conscious of new instincts which made him vow revenge, and which told him he could do something in the world some day. Had he been less clever, it might have fared better with him. His retentive memory was far worse for him than if he had had the power of covering his injuries with oblivion. He had not been long enough in confinement to become pallid

or heavy-eyed—in fact, he had been fed better than usual; the prison diet was like feasting. It was not his body which had suffered, but his soul. At the expiration of the twelve days, there was not only a wild look in the poor boy's face, but all the self-respect had gone out of him. He hung his head with a sense of shame, as if he could no longer walk erect, and the sunlight, of which he had been so fond, seemed to dazzle him. But this was not the worst. It was not only that life seemed to be almost as much over for him as if the last planks had been nailed over his little body, but that deep down in his heart there slumbered a sullen dull instinct of revenge.

'Blast them!' he cried, though he had promised Polly he would not use bad language. 'Blast him!' as he thought of the magistrate, with a sudden frenzy of impotent passion.

The woman who had tried to say a word for him was fairly frightened into the belief that the child's wits had been scared 'out o' him,' as she met him coming away from the tumble-

down cottage in which he had lived with old Jem. Her explanation was afterwards that he was not only grumpy and glum, as if nothing would ever make him smile in this life again, but that he wandered in his speech, and seemed stupid—'nilly, willy,' as she put it.

'I wish they'd 'ave killed me—it 'ud been soon done wi',' he said, rubbing his fists into his eyes, in his determination not to disgrace his manhood of ten years old. And these were the only sensible words which she could get out of him.

As to Sir George—of whom the child had heard in prison that he only cared for one stratum of humanity, his own, and the rubbish which lay beneath it might be kicked at and trodden down—he had oddly determined to be equal with him, to make his way in the world, and by-and-by to defy him.

The boy was quick enough when he chose to learn, and he had proved an apt pupil at his new school, the prison. All pains were to be taken, all means to be justifiable by which tyrants could be met as equals. His ideas

were perhaps a little confused, but he had almost an iron constitution. From his babyhood he had been used to bear cold, hunger, and thirst, to sleep anywhere and anyhow, to bend his body into all sorts of extraordinary positions, to lift heavy weights, and endure all sorts of privations. He intended to put his abilities to good use. He would emigrate, work hard, learn everything that he could, and come back with a fortune to defy his would-be masters.

There was a desperate fellow, who had been in Australia, now in the prison, and this man's stories, told at nights—in the days when the same precautions are not taken as they are now, and when the 'non-imprisonment of children' was a question not even debated—had fired the little urchin's imagination. It is likely that these tales of adventure, under any circumstances, would not have left the boy's mind, and the drearier his life in ——shire, the more he probably would have longed after these wild exploits of fabulous travel.

'You're not quite a fool,' one of the man's

fellow-prisoners had answered, 'but that kind of talk is all my eye.'

'Little Nobody' believed in it, and meant to prove it. Once, on the day after he came out of prison, he saw Sir George's carriage pass, the owner driving with his wife and child, and looking obtuse and self-complacent. He would probably have laughed heartily if he could have been informed that the small gaol-bird had shaken his fist at the carriage until it vanished, that his little body had been contorted with rage, as if the boy were in a fit, that his strong white teeth had been ground together, and that he had tried to pull his once lion-like mane as if he would drag it from the roots, and had been in a greater rage than ever when he found that the prison scissors had only left him short stubbly stuff to torture.

But the sight of the carriage had done something. It had intensified his resolution. More than ever he was determined that he would not stay in the town where he had been flogged, and proved guilty of a punishable offence. The punishment which had been

administered was shameful and degrading. Rather would he walk to his death, with suffocating heart and blistered feet. He had been used to long-continued hunger, and it was nothing to him to plod painfully over hill and dale. The walk to Bristol might be a long and painful one, and he would have to earn his bread upon the way. It was all the more painful now that he believed no more in Mary Burton's angels. If there were any such things as angels, why should they allow such things to be?

But, if the child did not believe in angels, he believed in endurance of suffering. One of the men in prison had told a tale of General Jackson—how, when he filled the post of president in the United States, he and his men could bear privations. It was quoted of him that once, when warring against the Indians, he perceived acorns, which were spread on the door of a hut in which they had taken refuge.

'Gentlemen,' said Jackson, looking significantly at the acorns, 'we have no reason to complain of want of food.'

The story—true or not—had photographed itself indelibly on the memory of the boy, as he thought of the many miles of dusty road which lay before him, and which he should be forced, shoeless, to tread.

A little girl, who had loved him, and who had been accustomed to play with him in the days before Polly Burton's death, when love of solitude had not taken possession of the unhappy waif, watched for him from one of the cottages with large, liquid eyes, and offered him a crust of bread. But a better instance of the evil which maltreatment had already brought on his nature could not have been given than by the push which he gave his would-be helper, bringing the tears to her eyes, as he burst from her grasp. The poor, little, puckered, woebegone face controlled itself with an effort; for the child had the intuition of a woman, that 'Ile Jem' would never have given her that surly push, if they had not been cruel to him.

The girl had belonged to the somewhat particular clique of people whom Polly Burton had liked to favour.

'Yew're glad yew've a-cum out—aren't yew now?' she said, twining her arms again about her friend. 'Lord! who's to pay for yewer vittels and drink, if there's nobody as 'ill employ yew?' she added, with sharp precocity.

This was a difficulty which had not yet occurred to Jem. But, if he needed a further proof that the honest and independent peasantry would have as little as possible to do with prisons, he had it at that moment in the fact that a woman appeared at the door, calling sharply, and the girl, recognising her mother, turned immediately, and went in.

'And yet I niver knewed the law, and never i'tended to go 'gainst it—niver,' thought the waif, trying to speak soberly to himself, since one of his resolutions—essential to the carrying out of his deeply-laid plan of vengeance—was not again to let his passion visibly get the mastery of him, and to learn to read that he might try to keep himself closely within enactments and statutes, whenever he was likely to be found out. Otherwise his hand was against everyone, and everyone's hand

against him. He forgot all about Polly Burton and her precepts as he toiled, jaded, foot-sore, and heart-sick for some weary miles, covered with dust or wet with rain. Once a kind woman, to whom he said that he was walking to Bristol, gave him a bit of supper and offered a barn for him to sleep in for the night. But oftener he had to lie down in the hay-fields, or by the side of a hedge, gathering wild flowers to sell in the day-time, but no longer caring for the beauty of them. And, during these few days, there was one refrain chiming on in his heart,

'When I be grew'd a man, I'll back to pay 'im in 'is own coin.'

PART II.

A man's a man for a' that.

BURNS.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT thirty-three years afterwards, on a bright March afternoon, a man, vigorous in figure, and with one of those picturesquely bearded faces which have become more common in England than they were earlier in the century, with a shaggy overgrowth of hair hiding much of the features, was driving in a hired carriage in the neighbourhood of Torringmoor. This traveller had been borne, like other people, on the 'tireless wings' of the spirit of steam past mine and waste and common, past grey rocks and green pastures, watered by shining rivers, to the now flourishing town of Torringmoor, which not only boasted a railway station of its own, and had populous suburbs where once there had

been fields and flowery lanes, but had even for more than thirty years been allowed to have a voice in the government of its country.

The express train which had been tearing away at a terrible speed on its south-westward journey, carrying passengers from London, did not astonish the new-comer, and though the Torringmoor people were proud of the rapid growth of their town, in which the old landmarks seemed to have disappeared, he looked as if he thought it a sleepy sort of hole, compared, for instance, with such a place as Chicago.

Wherever he had spent the earlier portion of his life, the traveller had certainly been used to a world of change and progress, and, if he had anything to complain of in this 'tight little island,' it would have been that the people in it moved too slowly. But he did not, as a rule, reason about anything at all. He was not sufficiently educated to appreciate the intellectual development and social improvements which he took as a matter of course, and would have looked puzzled if any philosopher or historian had suggested to him that the present

age was one of the most wonderful in the history of the world—greater than the age of Augustus in Rome, of Leo X. in modern Italy, or of Louis XIV. in monarchical France, and possibly surpassing in our own country that Elizabethan era which is still to the majority of Englishmen a period the thought of which makes their heart glow with the enthusiasm of national exultation and pride.

Others might crack mental nuts of that sort. Reuben Sellwood, as he called himself, was more inclined to think that the old country was going to the dogs, and considered himself to be less of an Englishman than a cosmopolitan. He had picked up a sort of polyglot knowledge in his contact with adventurers of all nations. He prided himself on having little sentiment, and was not accustomed to render homage to grand old names, or to analyse high-sounding phrases. He cared less about the success of the age than his own personal success in it, and he would have cared little enough about that had he not looked upon it as a means to an end. He flattered himself that he was nearer to the accom-

plishment of that end than his wildest hopes had led him to expect, when—on landing but a short time before in England—he had seen the announcement for sale of a certain property called by its recent owner 'Broadmeads'—a property which was advertised at an enormous price, and which was built in close proximity to the estate known as 'Rashleigh Park.' That park still existed, but it was an open secret that its owner was no longer the greatest landowner of the parishes of Torringmoor and Waterdale.

Reuben Sellwood's past history was in a secret drawer. No one knew the trick of it, or could touch the spring. And his own son could not possibly have guessed at the reason why he determined instantly on the purchase of 'Broadmeads,' not even seeing the house and land before he closed with the bargain; still less why it should have been a triumphant day for Reuben when the great mine-owner, who had made an almost fabulous fortune, and built for himself that which he intended to be a palatial residence which should outshine the glories of Rashleigh Park, had suddenly failed, owing to

the rashness of his speculations, so that 'Broadmeads' was put up for sale.

People have their idiosyncracies, and Reuben considered he had right to his. He had never before talked seriously of residing for any length of time in England, though he had sent his only child to be educated in the old country. But then he had never spoken of his intentions or plans to anybody. And so impatient was he now to see the place which he had purchased that, if the driver had not been sure of securing a heavy fare, he would have resented the way in which this gentleman with bronzed face, and beard which seemed to have been burnished by too much exposure to the sun, kept urging him forward.

In the opinion of the driver there was not much to look at in the old moor that March afternoon when, as the sunlight began to fade, the north wind got the advantage and began stinging their faces. And yet the stranger in the carriage, who had not seemed to take any notice when he passed through Torringmoor, or passed people on the road who might observe

his 'queer ways,' would every now and then start up and look about him, bending his neck as if he would almost dislocate it—a proceeding on which he certainly would not have ventured had he not looked upon the man on the box-seat as a mere machine, not likely to take heed of anything.

Reuben Sellwood was generally no admirer of landscapes. He might have observed grimly of them (in the same spirit in which he once observed of the sea that it 'took too much room') that he had seen 'too many of them.' Mountain, vale, or wilderness were pretty much alike to him, and he would pretend that he was so utilitarian in his principles that factories and towns like busy ant-hills, with signs of man's determination to wrest gifts out of the hands of Nature, were the scenes which he most appreciated. No sound was so pleasant to him as that of the beating of Labour's heart. He liked to think that other men had spent their lives as he had in the stupid commonplace of getting on, and that few had conquered as he had done. And yet this man, who had

something *bourgeois* about the sharp expression of the little which could be seen of his face, the cut of his clothes, and even the shape of his boots. Yet he had none of the joyous swagger of success which is generally to be found amongst the rich *bourgeois* class.

As the carriage turned a corner of the road, its occupants came in sight of a river, not flowing quietly, as in the gentlest days of summer, or churned into creamy foam, as it gurgled over brown stones, but full of water, which overflowed the big boulders—hiding the mosses, which could be seen on them when the water was lower, and overflowing even the meadows, as it came bounding with a joyous rush of white through the stony jaws of a little gorge.

The sight was a fair one, the more so as the afternoon sun was declining, and its faint rays seemed to fall in oblique lines over the moor, which, though it was not now aglow with furze and heather, had yet retained a richness of colouring from its peat-bogs and deep beds of withered bracken—the 'red fern' of the ballad-writers. The reeds, the sedgy grass, the stunt-

ed oak-trees near the river, and the grey rocks in the distance added to the beauty of the picture, and yet hardly accounted for the manner in which Reuben Sellwood drew a deep breath, and struck his sun-burnt but well-shaped fist against the door of the carriage. Possibly he was interested in the surroundings of his new property.

I have said that he prided himself on not being romantic, and yet the bifold nature of the man—who, like most people, had not only a mixture of black and white qualities in his character, but in whom the shades were darker and the lights stronger than they are in the average man—might have been guessed by a cunning analyst of human nature.

The key-note of the moor was still its loneliness and desolation. Yet the traveller was scarcely likely to feel its ineradicable sadness. The weird impression of the little arrowy torrent dancing in the midst of the desolation, and of an old tree which had been hewn down perhaps some forty years before, but which, for some reason, had not been removed,

so that the frost and rain of years had split its smooth-hewn surface, might have impressed a poet or an artist, but seemed to be little in keeping with Reuben Sellwood's matter-of-fact disposition. He had travelled hard all day, not waiting to break his fast; and though he had been used to far more fatiguing journeys, and could endure greater bodily hardships, he had possibly not counted on the exhaustion which might be produced by the excitement of purchasing his new possessions, and that such exhaustion might render it most difficult for him to maintain his usual unimpassioned self-control.

As he leant back in the carriage with a muttered exclamation, it might have been the drowsiness caused by the keen air and long-continued exertion which made it a little difficult for him to keep his reasoning powers on the stretch. And he, who was accustomed to boast of his contempt for dreamers, lapsed into a reverie which was strangely like a dream, He dreamed that in the old days, before the march of civilization had swept them away,

there had been wolves and red deer on this moor; that there had once been pixies, sometimes shaped like rolling balls of heather, and sometimes shrouded in grey cloud, and that he had heard a little child calling to them,

'Wee folk, good folk,
Trooping all together,
Green jacket, red cap,
And grey cock's feather.'

The child's voice seemed to haunt him, as did an odd idea that where some cottages stood in rows there ought to be grand old oak trees, remarkable for the strength and upward spring of their branches. What had become of the wood which seemed as if it ought to stand where there were now blackberry branches trailing and old tree stumps? How came there to be a growth of rank grass on the open where he had dreamed of a picturesque road, with ruts made by the carts of wood-cutters, arched with overspreading branches, adorned with the richest foliage in summer, and enlivened by a joyous flood of bird-music in the young abundance of spring?

He—who prided himself on his want of imagination—had done his best to keep back these childish fancies, but they seemed to be born of his overwearied brain, just as mysterious forms, and what Mr. Ruskin would have called 'spiritualising' mists, were born of this stream of water and the distant tors. He was ready to swear at himself as a fool, especially as the silly old doggerel about 'Wee folk' kept jogging on in his head. And with it came another shadowy impression that some old woman had once told him about a pack of spectral hounds, whose cry was said sometimes to echo amongst the hollows of the hills.

The intellectual conception of anything spiritual—even of the humorous sort—had been for years utterly foreign to the man's nature. But, owing to the causes which I have mentioned, a superstitious dread, which is often to be found in connection with scepticism—as if the circumscribed nature made its protest against being kept within the narrow bounds which condemn it never to look deeper than the mere material fact of

its own life—was strangely gaining on him.

He was inclined to think his senses were fooling him, when suddenly, at the next turn of the road, he came upon a huntsman bespattered with mud, riding with impetuous speed. The apparition might have been an optical delusion, for all he knew to the contrary; for the driver—who, finding as soon as he had left Torringmoor that his new fare, so far from inviting confidence, was taciturn and a little abrupt, had relapsed into sulky silence—did not appear to have seen the huntsman at all. The appearance was evidently a creation of Reuben's own brain. Surely, if the rider had been what the metaphysicians call 'objective' instead of 'subjective,' he would have been leisurely returning in a common-sense way to his home, at an hour when a hunt—if it had taken place at all—must have been over. But that the huntsman should still be spurring on his tired mare, whose eyes were glittering, whose little ears were still erect, and nostrils still dilated, as if she and her rider had not had the glory, an hour or more

before, of being 'in at the death,' was a thing impossible. For the mare and her rider—evidently creatures of Reuben's distempered brain—looked a couple to go straight over hedges and ditches, when one after another of the lesser fry had ceased to follow.

These thoughts dimly shaped themselves in the traveller's mind as the huntsman came nearer, and, with a complexion which was strangely white, in spite of the healthy red which was stamped, like the ruddiness of an apple, into his cheeks, dashed past the carriage, and disappeared at the turn of the road.

Reuben would have tried to think no more of the apparition, except that his health must for once need the care of one of those superfluous beings called doctors, had not the huntsman been followed, a few moments afterwards, by a boy, bare-headed, and running swiftly, with every appearance of agitation. The driver seemed to wake from the stupor into which he also had relapsed, owing to the snubbing which he had resented, and shouted to the boy, who, more communicative than the gentleman, held

out a card with a pencilled message on it, as he gasped, short of breath,

'It is poor oud Sir George—he be terrible bad—a fit, or summut. Mr. Monckton be a-going for the doctor at Torringmoor. But there's another as lives nearer, at Tewton, ye sees. I be hurryin' for he.'

What was the matter with Reuben Sellwood? Was he, as he himself fancied, in that state from an overstrained nervous system, in which the taxed brain can bear no extra pressure? Why else should the perspiration break out in drops on his forehead, and the deep breaths which he had drawn once or twice when looking at the landscape became quicker and more laboured? Why should his own healthy colour fade even more perceptibly than that of Colin Monckton, who had been for several years the intimate friend of Sir George Rashleigh, and who might well reproach himself for allowing himself to be separated from the old gentleman —having been conscious as usual of the presence of neither friend nor foe from the moment that the first difficult line of fences rose stiff and

straight before him that morning. It was all very natural for Mr. Monckton to feel it. But why should a stranger who prided himself on his want of sentiment have to make two or three ineffectual efforts to speak, and then ask in a quick, sharp tone, and in a voice which did not seem to belong to him,

'What was that?' he said, 'an accident—a fit—somebody—injured—*who?*'

'He'll be a stranger to you—Sir George Rashleigh—anyway,' answered the man on the box-seat, slackening the speed of his horses, as he looked with his mouth wide open at the 'foreigneering' gentleman, who for the first time seemed to take a real interest in anything.

'Stranger! yes, I believe you,' repeated the new-comer—who was afterwards described by the flyman as a 'queer customer'—bursting into a peal of harsh, unnatural laughter.

''Tis nought to laugh at, as I sees—anyhow, he be a-dyin'——' muttered the honest fellow, eyeing Reuben Sellwood with something of the same expression with which the pilot's boy might have looked at the ancient mariner.

'Attend to your horses. I laughed at something connected with my own affairs,' answered Reuben, angrily, as he resumed his usual harsh, arbitrary manner.

And the man, a little ashamed of his own uncharitable fancy that there had been something wicked-looking in the expression of the face of the unknown gentleman, drove on as he was desired.

CHAPTER II.

REUBEN afterwards heard what the flyman had failed to tell him—how that morning the rustics near Rashleigh Park had been all agape as an army of gentlefolk had invaded the village, streaming from all directions, most of the ladies gaily dressed and in barouches and pony-carriages, and some of the more enterprising damsels mounted on horseback.

In other words, the placidity of Rashleigh had been disturbed by a meet, and Sir George's pack, which had no right to be kept up considering the impecuniosity of its owner, was said to be in 'unusually good form' as it sped away in the eastward direction. Torringmoor lay to the west, and had other excitements of its

own, its more enterprising inhabitants looking down on the hob-nailed cincinnati who were too willing to desert their ploughs to follow the cry of the hounds, and to admire the costumes of the hunters. But, had Reuben Sellwood cared to enter into conversation with the Torringmoor people that morning, he would have heard many remarks of disapproval, and seen many shaking their heads at the rashness of Sir George who, in spite of repeated warnings in the way of a broken collar-bone on one occasion and fractured ribs on another, had yet persisted in ignoring the advance of age, which rendered feats which had been easy of accomplishment when he was younger, absolutely impracticable for him now. And it was well-known that it required no little quickness of eye and skill in horsemanship, to follow hounds over the morasses and rock-strewn hills.

A moraliser, fond of dealing in commonplace platitudes, could have drawn a good picture of the uncertainty of human pleasures from a contrast between the neighbourhood of Rash-

leigh Park that morning and evening. In the morning there had been a bewildering vision of carriages filled with bright, expectant faces; groups of men in picturesque costume talking eagerly together, and the villagers had been delighted by the sound of the huntsman's horn, the crack of whips, and the yelp of the dogs, with the blue sky above, in the fresh, invigorating air. Now the temporary excitement was over, the merry party of people which had met together that morning having dispersed under the influence of the bad news which threw a gloom over everything. No one had been with Sir George when the accident took place. He had seemed to lack his usual energy, falling behind the others, as soon as the hounds were on the scent. Some surmised that he had had a fit, others that he had been thrown in carelessly attempting to take a fence which presented no such difficulties as to account for the catastrophe. Anyhow he had been found lying senseless on the grass, with his horse standing by looking as sympathetic as a human being. His friends were so star-

tled at his appearance when they lifted him up, that they thought it better not to risk the jolting of a carriage, and therefore a litter had been hastily improvised and four stalwart men were now carrying him to Rashleigh Hall. The pony-carriages with their fair drivers had long since disappeared. Only one or two sturdy horsemen lingered about the park gates to see if they 'could be of any use.' But all thoughts of selfish amusement, with all chatter and commonplace talk had ceased long before.

The driver of Reuben Sellwood's carriage had again to slacken the speed of his horses to save being brought in contact with the last remnant of the tag-rag-and-bobtail which—attracted by the new excitement—still followed the mournful procession at a respectful distance.

The owner of Broadmeads had conquered his transient excitement, and leant back on the cushioned seat of the carriage with a look of passionless indifference almost amounting to boredom, as if nothing disturbed him but the

slight delay which almost amounted to annoyance. Had he been a few minutes earlier, he would not have been able to help seeing the litter carried into Rashleigh, with the figure on it, looking gaunt in the evening light, though the face had been carefully covered up.

Reuben was on his guard as he gave a passing glance at the little crowd near the park, and muttered, as if to himself,

'Well, if report speaks true, he was not in all respects such a neighbour as one would desire—still I am sorry—it should have come to this.'

It was the strangest return to the place he had bought.

'A bad omen,' the servants said, who were standing in the hall of Broadmeads to meet the new master. He told himself that it was scarcely surprising he should be dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe; and certainly as he drove in through the splendid iron gates—in themselves supposed to be a culmination of artistic skill, and on which his predecessor had

lavished a fabulous sum of money—he scarcely noticed their magnificence, nor the beauty of a new plantation in which trees of every variety, from the deodora to the Wellingtonia, had taken root and seemed to flourish.

His coldness of demeanour was more studied than usual as he walked through the entrance-hall to the dining-room, and informed the man whom he had engaged as butler that he wished to be alone, and would require nothing but a few biscuits and some brandy and water till he rang for him.

Reuben Sellwood was a temperate man: his temperance had stood him in good stead at certain crises in his life when it had enabled him to triumph over others who were less temperate. But on this occasion he helped himself to the brandy more than once, though—in spite of his long fast—his appetite had disappeared. He did not ring for some time, exhausted though he was from want of food. He would not have been able to give an account of the strange, conflicting emotions which struggled within him, but these emotions made him

desire to keep by himself. He was so accustomed to keep a strict watch over himself, and if possible to betray no feeling to his fellow-men, and so conscious that the storm which was convulsing his inner man, and which was making his eyes burn and his strong frame tremble in spite of himself, might betray itself in the tones of his voice or in some passing glance, that he required a little time to recover his habitual reserve.

His wit was too rude, his intelligence too uncultivated to enable him to analyse these emotions. But now that he was alone, and it was no longer necessary to hide the swift changes of disappointment, vexation, rage, and pity which passed over that usually impassive portion of his face which he had been unable to veil from his fellow-men, he rose once or twice and walked rapidly up and down the room, murmuring something between his set teeth, and even bursting into another fit of the rather horrible merriment which had so disturbed the Torringmoor driver, and which made it seem as if for some unaccountable

reason the hate and exultation in his heart had been shaken into discordant laughter.

CHAPTER III.

REUBEN SELLWOOD had scarcely noticed the place which he had been so eager to purchase in the shades of evening. He had to wait for the next morning to experience his just keenness of disappointment in the fact that—seen by daylight—the mansion, which was partly modern Gothic and partly Jacobean, presented too much of that mixture of styles, that aiming at the combination of inconsistent novelties, which often proves the pitfall for the taste of a self-made Englishman.

The ivory, the purple, and the cedar had been brought from different climates as for Solomon, but Reuben had heard enough of the ways of the aristocracy to see at a glance that the finishing

touch of some well-educated man, or high-bred lady was painfully needed, and there was that in Reuben's temperament, though he was by no means free from vulgarity, which made him wince a little as he recognised the want. If there had been a receipt for withering the furniture a little, making it look properly old, with the faded lovelinesses which Reuben had some dim idea would be natural in great people's houses, he might have liked it a little better. But there was nothing in this house stately with age, and the large gilded mirrors and velvet pile carpets reminded him too much of the great hotels with which he was already familiar.

He was not happy in the house, shutting himself up as much as possible, though the Torringmoor people were ready, as he had expected, to bow before his wealth. He only scorned them for it, and took little interest in any of the cards which were left by the neighbours, concerning himself about none of them but the owner of Rashleigh Hall.

It seemed a little odd that a man who cared so little about his neighbours should trouble

himself to inquire constantly about the old patrician who lay dying in the neighbouring hall, and that he should appear to take more than a little interest in the details of the painful bodily suffering caused by those injuries to the spine which were expected by slow degrees to prove fatal. He listened apparently with half-an-ear to the story of how the son, the future Sir Ralph, who led a retired life, had not been the only son, but had had a twin brother who, being by about half an hour the elder, would have inherited the title had he lived to do so.

'But that wur the queer part of the story, as I allus ses,' continued the gossiping housekeeper, 'they do say as that lad Richard, as they called 'im, was quite different from the rest of 'em, and as how he turned up his nose at what he called shabby gentility when he wur quite a youngster. There was no sich thing as contradicting 'im, but he sets out by hisself to some place among the savages to build the family fortunes, as he puts it. Well, he marries an' all on his own hook, like, and ses as he hates

all hartificial ways of living—all shams, as he calls 'em—that his sons shall learn to plough and his daughters to milk the cows, and all of 'em to live on together in a sort o' Hirish Eden. Then you see, as a body with a bit o' sense might ha' known all along, he died of a fever, and his gentle lady o' pining. And back comes all by herself the most managin' little maid, the last left o' the family.'

'And what became of the child after she returned from New Zealand?'

'Well, it wur just for all the world like a fairy tale. Home she comes with roses from the sea-air on her cheeks, and box packed with shells, and seaweed, and feathers, and sich things—and some money, which they do say the old gen'l'man wasted. But the comfort as she wur—that little un with her bright ways, and such a managin' head on her shoulders. For hafter the death o' his mother it's Mr. Ralph who gets married to a furrin lady as was allus a grumbling when she found how poor the family was. Then she would lie with her black eyes a-starin', and little Miss Vere a-tending of her,

and she a-dwindling away, accustomed all her life to company. And what company could she git? For what comfort,' suggested chatty Mrs. Rose, who was glad to gossip about anything to which her taciturn bachelor master would listen, 'could all they horsey gen'l'men be to she?'

Reuben tried to hide his inquisitiveness. It was no news to him that Ralph had married a foreign countess, and that that lady had brought no money to replenish the family coffers already exhausted by the extravagance of his grandfather and likely to suffer further still—in spite of Sir George's pretences at economy in other things—on account of his father's mad propensity for hunting. But the story of the elder brother who—directly he had discovered that his chances of doing anything he wanted were likely to be ruined by money difficulties in England—had shown such a strength of will in setting out to do the best for himself and for others, was as interesting as that of the little girl who, with temper unsoured after the death of her parents, seemed to have taken up

her father's work, and let her daily thought be for the people she lived with. It was easy to guess that the bare notion of emigration would have been distasteful to the retiring and scholarly habits of Mr. Ralph.

'He wur allus one to sit at home, heven when his lady wur taken from 'im, though they do say as Miss Vere wur a born sick-nurse, and that though she wur but ten year old it wur pretty to see how she took the charge o' that new baby. And I often ses,' continued the good soul, 'how if Mr. Ralph's wife had lived, or the dowager leddy either, old Sir George 'ud never ha' been let ride when he had ought to have been sittin' comferble-like in his arm-chair, let alone the fac' that he had a letter given to him the mornin' of the 'unt—a business letter, as they ses, which was disturbin'-like; but there, God A'mighty on'y knows whether he was took with a kin' of fit, or whether, when the hoss tries to jump and jerks him a bit, he jes' tumbles off cos as how he could not sit—leastways, he'll never be the same again, and it is agonies as they ses he suffers in his poor old back.'

Reuben Sellwood made no remark. He was taciturn as usual. But he shifted his chair, and sat with his head bent down, and his back to the light, as Mrs. Rose, who loved nothing so well as to spin a yarn of her own, however unsympathetic might be her listener, continued rapidly, as if she was afraid her communication might be interrupted.

'And most misfortunate is the famelly, sir, for Sir Ralph as'll soon be—with the poor old gen'l'man having, so to speak, both feet in the grave a'ready—is not much above furty, and beggin' yer pardin', lookin' older than yerself, sir—for not only did he love his leddy, but his heir as should be is a bit of a gell, and no such right to what is left as Miss Vere as wur the elder brother's child. There be a matter o' ten years, as I ses afore, atween the two. They du say as the eldest is like a mother to the leetle un—bless both their pretty faces. A nice little black-eyed gell, a bit like her furrin mother, that little un—and yet she 'minds me o' un as I buried nigh her age. And her father as weighted with the old gen'l'man's debts, as

well as his grandfather's that went afore—and all that by Mr. Richard's plans—the crushingest disappointment. No wonder as Mr. Ralph's a bit snarlish-like, he 'ad enuff to worrit him if ever a livin' man 'ad—for both the old gentleman and the one afore him in their ways as ye understand—the one a sort o' screw 'bout everything but horses, and the other,' here, to fill up a rhetorical pause, Mrs. Rose held up both her hands, 'they were both *that* extravagant—the un with his rowdy ways, and t'other as allus said he weren't extravagant neither.'

'There, that will do, my good woman,' said her master, in a deep voice which came from him so suddenly and so sharply that, as Mrs. Rose afterwards explained to those whom she called her 'busom friends,' it 'went through her like a dart, and turned her blood all to cuds-like.' 'That will do,' said Reuben, with quite unnecessary sternness. 'Remember that the one thing I can never forgive in a cook is unpunctuality. Let everything be properly done, and spare no expense to do it, but bear in mind

that I do not wish to hear anything about it.'

Mrs. Rose curtseyed and went away muttering, yet a little mollified by the judicious clause 'spare no expense,' which justified her in ordering a new black silk dress, and a dress cap which she had long coveted, though, as she explained to her confidants, her new master was 'a hodd one.'

'A letter,'—he received a letter that morning —'I wonder if it was a lawyer's letter,' thought the new-comer, who, without any conceivable cause grumbled at all the dishes which were served to him that day, and told Mrs. Rose to dismiss the cook, though he had hitherto appeared not to have a fastidious appetite. An outsider might have said that the rich man was troubled, ashamed in a way which he could scarcely explain, ready to hate himself and everything about him, and to loathe the new house which he had purchased with his savings, if he could have seen him with his head resting on his arms for hours together, deep in thought, during that day.

Naturally enough the tragic catastrophe

which had happened to the great man of the neighbourhood, whose impoverished fortunes had often before furnished a subject for conversation, was the principal theme of talk in the mouths of the few visitors to whom Reuben could not well refuse admission.

'A more melancholy state of things it would be scarcely possible to picture to yourself,' said one of the Torringmoor manufacturers who volunteered his information to the owner of Broadmeads—Reuben being too downright to excuse himself by the fashionable lady's fib of 'not at home,' and having no excuse for refusing to see a man who sent in his card that he was a bachelor, and would like to make his acquaintance. 'One might think that a curse had alighted on the family, though it is one of the oldest ones in ——shire. You see, the father and grandfather of the man who will soon have the title were both equally selfish. The former fellow was decidedly the *most* extravagant, but, though Sir George knew how things were going, he was such a dab at fox-hunting, and liked to keep up the name for taking the lead in

that sort of thing in this part of the county, that there is no doubt he launched out too much in that direction, whilst he was pretending to curtail in another. They do say,' he added, dropping his voice, 'that the property is heavily mortgaged, and that much of it will belong to Sir Ralph only in appearance. Sooner or later it must pass into other hands—there is some mystery about the mortgagee—these things generally pass into the hands of several people—but they do say——'

An acute observer might have seen a glance keen as steel dart from the dark blue eyes of Reuben Sellwood, as a change of some sort, like a ripple caused by a sudden gust on ordinary impassive water, passed over his face, and, seeming to deprecate further information, he held up his hand as if to impose that reticence which he was known to practise habitually himself.

The Torringmoor manufacturer was not an acute observer, and did not notice how Reuben managed again to bring up the subject which he appeared to have dropped, though he

seemed as usual to be lending only half an ear to the chatter of his guest.

'Hard lines for the future Sir Ralph,' remarked Reuben, with a yawn. The manufacturer afterwards said to his wife that he was a 'rough sort of customer,' and had not learnt manners in being battered about the world. To the rich man he answered, politely,

'Yes, a laborious sort of fellow—does his best under the circumstances, but proud—proud as Lucifer; just the sort of man to make an excuse for shutting up his place, and living quietly abroad, because he can't meet the expenses. A vast improvement on poor Sir George, who didn't manage to keep out of scrapes himself, though he was a blustering sort of magistrate, and hard enough on the peccadilloes of the poorer folk whom he had to deal with. When Sir Ralph comes into what they call the property, he will find that one half already has taken to itself wings, and the other half is hypothetical. Most of it is mortgaged, and the curious part of it is that they say there are not many creditors, but that

the whole is likely to pass to one man, and he a foreigner.'

'Warranted to go on like a barrel-organ for hours,' thought Reuben, whom nothing irritated like small talk. Yet a refrain of the barrel-organ rang in his ears, and even haunted him in his dreams that night. 'One might almost think there was a curse on the family.'

The attitude of the cynical new-comer during the next few weeks hardly seemed to justify him in trying to usurp for himself the character of a Diogenes, or even to allow him to class himself with that half of the world which, according to the celebrated saying of Talleyrand, rejoices at the misfortunes of its neighbours. That the owner of Rashleigh Park was writhing day after day in sufferings which medical skill was almost powerless to alleviate, seemed to affect him in a singular way, as if he could give little attention to anything else.

In accordance with the directions which he had given to Mrs. Rose, gardeners—chipping, chopping, planting fresh flowers, and mowing the beautiful lawns—were busy day after day in

the gardens of Broadmeads. But though spring was coming in with its golden daffodils, its white narcissi in the gardens, its little pink-headed daisies and its yellow and blue hearts-ease, and though the simple-hearted people in the neighbourhood could enjoy themselves in their little plots of ground—the poorer sort sending their little ones into the green fields to gather the pale cuckoo-flower and bells of blue hyacinth with the yellow primrose and golden kingcup—a heavy weight seemed to lie upon the heart of the man who, avowedly by his own exertions, had been able to beautify his life with such surroundings as few can enjoy. One might have said that the motive which had made exertion pleasant to him, and the fruits of exertion worth coveting, had been suddenly withdrawn.

Reuben Sellwood still kept up the mask in the presence of others. But, when he was alone, he lapsed into the dulness of languor. The poor peasant in the neighbourhood of Torringmoor, invited that spring by the Divine Master to a feast of beauties which is our ear-

nest in this life of greater and higher delights, was happier than Reuben. Nature's ritual, with its odorous breezes, its blended tints, and its rush of harmonious sound, did absolutely nothing to satisfy him ; the feast was spread in vain. He sat alone, and no one could guess that he was secretly troubled by the thought of the poor, disappointed, heart-broken old man who was dying slowly in protracted agonies in a neighbouring mansion. He would not admit that the matter was of any consequence to him, who had prided himself on the fact that his heart had been shut for years to the grievances of any of his fellow-creatures. Possibly it was, because he was unused to most of the recreations with which others are accustomed to beguile their leisure, that this event which, if he had heard of it at a distance, would have seemed to be nothing to him, had the power to disturb his peace when he realised it in detail.

CHAPTER IV.

THOUGH, after a time, Reuben Sellwood had judiciously determined not to draw attention to himself by appearing to be too much of an anchorite, and refusing to see the people who called on him from Torringmoor, it could not fail to be a matter of remark that those who had speech with the new-comer knew no more about him than if they had abstained from seeking his acquaintance.

Had he wife and family, as most respectable men were supposed to have? Did he hail from America or Australia, and had he made his money in trade? It was remarkable that no one dared to put these questions point-blank. Many had beaten about the bush, and one en-

terprising lady from Torringmoor, more daring than the rest, had ventured upon a sort of prefatory catechism, only to discover that the 'enigma'—as Mr. Sellwood began to be nicknamed—however deficient he might be in other sciences, was a scientific adept in the art of verbal fencing.

One thing was certain, that the 'enigma' made no pretence to be other than a self-made man. Yet it could not fail to be noticed that, though he was ready enough to announce this fact, he never told a single anecdote of his earlier life, and parried all inquiries with a reticence which he practised to such an extent that the gossips decided with a sigh of despair that even his nationality seemed to be a point which must be kept shrouded in uncertainty. He called himself a 'cosmopolitan,' an explanation which they were fain to accept.

'Even supposing he is an American,' remarked one pompous man, deigning to explain for the benefit of the weaker sex, 'you see, it would not make him a foreigner, for the English-speaking folk, wherever they dwell, and under

whatever government, must be still our people.'

The name 'Reuben' was felt to be misleading. The man was fair, and had not the unmistakable physiognomy to be seen now in flesh and blood, little altered since it was carved on the stones of Nineveh. The men of Torringmoor shook their heads, and again explained to the women, who were inclined to invent a romance like that of the Rothschilds,

'The fellow is no great commercial prince, no Haroun-el-Raschid, and no great Hebrew financier either, however he may have chosen to adopt a Jewish name.'

So the tongues wagged for a little while and then found they had nothing further to wag about.

Little difficulty was made about admitting the rich man to the club at Torringmoor, although that club—like most in provincial towns—had prided itself on its narrow exclusiveness, apparently because no name had yet been enrolled upon its list which was of any consequence to the world at large. It was difficult for anyone not amongst the

initiated to steer his social course so as to keep out of all the little eddies and currents of prejudices, conservative respectabilities, and sectarian shibboleths which a new-comer could by no means afford to defy. But Reuben Sellwood did not defy them; he simply ignored them. And, unpolished as was his address, he had talents of his own which marked him out from the common ruck. Business men who made his acquaintance soon discovered that he had an aptitude for mechanical invention, and was able instantly to suggest some small improvements in the machinery they employed, which proved lucrative in the long run, and made them wonder less that he himself should have been able in the course of years to amass a not inconsiderable fortune.

'They do these things better than we do in America,' was once more tentatively said.

'So I have heard,' answered the man, who was never off his guard, and who was careful never to let slip words which should betray his familiarity with the newer as well as the older side of the ocean, although he was con-

tinually and almost unconsciously making comparisons—comparisons which were not altogether to the credit of the provincial people, who, with a narrow and unjust heedlessness of the opinions of other nations, were nursing their little prejudices and their insular pride in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, which seemed stirring enough to them, but to which, as Reuben scornfully thought, they could retire like lobsters who had cast their shells and were afraid of being rubbed by too active contact with their more enterprising fellows.

Power is sweet, and flattery not unacceptable to most of us. Reuben had always looked forward to enjoying it, and was not philosopher enough to understand the sudden sense of satiety and reaction, which was already making the fruit taste bitter which he had left so long to ripen.

The man, as his new acquaintances reasoned, had probably gone through much, and been moulded by many experiences. He held his head erect, and looked, they said, as if his hair, as well as his complexion, had been subjected

to the scorching processes of a tropical sun, whilst his broad chest and powerful physique seemed to tell the tale of his having been braced by more than ordinary exposure and fatigue. His words were energetic and definite, but generally few. They went, said the more sentimental of the Torringmoor folk, like rifle-shot straight to the mark. He disliked what he called hollow babble, and did not mince his speech. 'Poltroons, idiots!' he muttered more than once to himself, as he winced at what he called their 'hollow babble.' And yet he smiled rather grimly to himself when he found that other men deferred, not only to his wealth, but to a capability which was new to them, and consequently rather startling. He owed, as he felt, nothing to anyone, and was scarcely aware how he in his turn had begun to look down on all the little fry of butchers, bakers, and candle-stick-makers, being tyrannical in his dealings with them, and never brooking interference from anyone beneath him. From a habit of watching affairs with an amount of keenness which approximated to genius, he had become

accustomed to consider his own power as omnipotent; and those who sought his advice found him skilled in the secret of screwing down to the lowest the wages of the most competent workmen, with a decision of will and toughness of heart which had hitherto been unprecedented at Torringmoor.

It was an ill compliment to that class which is accustomed to be called the higher one, that this tendency to injustice to those beneath him, and also a certain contemptuous inclination to keep aloof from those aspiring citizens who had just cast the chrysalis of the shop, and had retired in the newly-acquired butterfly state to gorgeous suburban villas, should have been taken as a sort of indication that a strain of nobler blood, possibly communicated to him from some remote ancestor, ran in the veins of the owner of Broadmeads.

'I don't pretend to know all the ins and outs of my family,' answered Reuben, with ready *aplomb*, when some fresh adventuress, credited, according to the old tradition, with the curiosity of Eve, remarked graciously on the pro-

bability of Mr. Sellwood belonging to that branch of the family of Sellwoods which was well-known in Dorsetshire. 'Madam, I was not aware that there were any Sellwoods in Dorsetshire.'

His voice sounded so very determined and defiant, and the look of severity, coupled with keen observation, which formed the main characteristic of Mr. Sellwood's face, was so terrific that the good lady forgot to detect the owner of Broadmeads in his first unwise admission.

Reuben was himself aware of the 'slip,' and chafed over it in secret. It worried him nearly as much as the weary feeling which he had had lately, as if the principal concern in his life was over, had worried him lately.

Meanwhile the crisis of the tragedy was fast approaching at Rashleigh Hall.

On a night towards the close of April, a group of figures was gathered round the bed on which the form, which looked a little more gaunt and tall, had been lying since the beginning of the illness. Sir George had not asked any ques-

tions, or seemed to take much notice of anything which had passed since his accident. But now that waking-up of the intelligence, which the doctors had prophesied would come before the end, warned the watchers that that end was nearer than they had expected. And as the sufferer began to toss about, clutching at the counterpane, he muttered for the first time articulate sounds.

His son bent down to catch the words, and started as he heard that the revelations which had been dimly hinted at were all too true, 'Could not help it—it was the debts; could not pay the money—*all the estates.*'

CHAPTER V.

REUBEN SELLWOOD was reputed to love no one, but the world was wrong in so judging. He had a soft place in his heart for his only son. He would have increased his reputation for cynicism if he could have told how—in being battered about in different countries, and coming into contact with much of that evil which is so difficult to disentangle from the remnants of good—his experience of women had been unfortunate. He had been shaken out of all his finer theories about the sex, and, as soon as he became a victim to that devastating doubt which will sometimes make itself felt in morals, as well as in mental difficulties, he was wont to say,

'Some of them may be angels, but the larger proportion are—not to use a stronger word—wretched hypocrites. You can't trust 'em, and it is no use to make companions of 'em.'

And yet he had married, when fortune began to smile upon him—a girl who was supposed to be somewhat above him in birth. He had no intention of making a friend of her, or of trying to sheath his own rough nature in the softer tissues of hers, but he liked her to be dressed luxuriously, and always to drive in a carriage, and he would boast that she had quite an 'eastern' love of luxury. So far from not humouring her extravagance, he would talk largely of that extravagance as of something 'oriental,' which reflected a sort of glamour upon him.

In this sort of talk he showed his weakness, but in most respects his tact helped him to avoid any solecisms in manners. Whether or not, as the theory was, he had educated himself, he was certainly fairly well educated. Probably it was owing to a habit of reading

Shakespeare in his leisure hours that—except for an occasional expression, which, as he was always on his guard, he seldom let slip before strangers—his style in English was far from bad. Better in some cases in its terseness and even in its abruptness, than the style of others who had received a more classical education,—had it not been for the lapses in grammar.

The wife died; she was kept for a few years like a canary bird in a cage which was supplied with plenty of seed, cake, and groundsel. She was expected to chirp and not to cry, but possibly she pined, as canaries are apt to do, for a little human love, or the companionship of her mate.

Her boy was delicate like herself. He resembled his mother in his fairness of complexion and his delicately-cut features, and he had blue eyes like the father's. His hands were a trifle too white and effeminate in size, possibly it was hard manual labour which had made the father's grow large and bony.

Reuben had not shown his usual severity to this child, possibly because he had lost two

others, who died in infancy. The boy had been remarkable before he left school, for a dreamy look in his face—'visionary,' some people called it. He had been apt to wander about for hours by himself, and his father—concluding somewhat disdainfully of the lad that he would be like his mother in 'building air-castles and not realities,' and in taking sickly imaginings for reasoning power—had nicknamed him, with tender condescension, his 'poet.'

'Poets must not work, they must have others to give them everything,' he would say, as he loaded the child with pocket-money.

This fair-haired, gentle-looking boy was his only toy in the earlier days when, though he had some capital at his command, he had not achieved his present success. He liked to be seen in public with the lad, as if he knew that the juxtaposition was picturesque. He sent him to England before he returned to the old country himself, that he might be educated at Eton and afterwards at Oxford. He was almost sorry when Godfrey—as the boy had been called to gratify a fancy of the mother's—

had grown hardier in the course of years so as to lose something of the look of exceeding refinement which the practised eye of a médical man would have recognised as the sign of a state of delicate health.

It was now seven or eight years since Godfrey had begun to think, and had understood that little was known respecting his father's antecedents.

'Don't trouble yourself with what does not concern you,' Reuben had answered, a little sternly, when the lad asked a few questions. 'You worry yourself with fancies. It is too early yet. You will have time for all that nonsense when, at the university, you take up that humbug called metaphysics.'

He seldom reproved his son, and, though he privately despised all his youthful enthusiasms, he yet abstained from throwing cold water on them. Nonsensical aspirations were to be excused in 'poets.' And though this was a nickname which Godfrey would willingly have forgotten, and his father could have adopted no better method to deter the lad from writing a

line of verse, yet there was something in his character—which tallied with his frail physique, and which seemed to be shadowed by the memories of his mother's long-continued sickness, and his own early life—which gave a satiric sting to the title.

Reuben put a tolerably high price on this article of his own 'turning out.'

'I have spared no expense to make him what he is,' he would say to himself of his elegant son, whom he believed to be a thoroughbred product of this highly-strung modern civilization. 'I cannot talk their language,' he would think to himself. 'There is something which one feels but cannot articulate. But he—he has been brought up to it—he can chatter all their jargon. It is he who shall right me and show that he can hold his own amongst people of any rank. They shall bow down to him. He shall claim a share in their great memories.'

He tried to repeat this cherished idea to himself on the morning of the day when Sir George's funeral passed a road leading to the

little churchyard which could be seen from the windows of the house at Broadmeads. It was a windy day with showers of rain, and the *cortège*, swelled by many of the carriages of the gentry in the neighbourhood, had to contend with stormy gusts which threatened to blow over the hearse with long black plumes, which the protests of Dickens and other writers had not yet rendered obsolete. Reuben, who stood at the window which overlooked the road, shuddered and turned away as he thought for the hundredth time of that lawyer's letter, and wondered whether without its intervention that man in his old age would have been doomed to a wretched death. Somehow, the bloom had been rubbed off his triumph. It was in vain to puzzle out the causes of his failure. But, as he turned away from looking at the funeral, the turmoil in his mind went on as badly as ever. And Reuben wondered if he was growing superstitious as he felt himself strangely sore at heart and bruised, as if he had just been freed from the assault of visible evil spirits.

A few days afterwards Sir Ralph was closeted with the family lawyer, and heard for the first time the full extent of the disaster which was a part of his inheritance. That the estate had already dwindled to a very meagre portion of what it had been centuries before, was no information to the new baronet. Aware of the difficulties which might befall him, and at the same time not without a rather overweening sense of his own importance and the value to be attached to the home of his ancestors, Ralph Rashleigh had struggled and striven even during the lifetime of his father, to perform his own not unimportant part in diminishing the sorrow which threatened him. But the load of debt seemed like a living thing to take hold of him, and to be for ever pulling himself and his father down—a thing from which he could not escape. Of late days, he and the older man had ceased to have altercations on a subject which was painful to them both. That the place had been heavily mortgaged was no secret to the son, but that more and more of the land was still being mortgaged was a fact that his father

thought unnecessary to confide to him, knowing that the estate was as dear to Ralph as it had been to any of his forefathers. The dreary suggestion of a fear as to the possibility of losing it, had more than once presented itself like a nightmare to his morbid imagination, but Ralph refused to be haunted by any such wild suggestion.

And now as he sat alone, after the lawyer had had his lunch and departed with papers and baggage in the trap to catch the London train—looking cherubic and self-satisfied as if there were no such thing as mortgages and family property in the world—Sir Ralph felt as if the walls of the room and everything about him were falling like a pack of cards.

It was characteristic of the new Baronet that he sat perfectly still, though the discovery which he had just made was a bitter one. Who could help it? When Sir George had succeeded to the estate, it was already a rapidly dwindling one. Energy and self-denial might have done much to right things then. But now it was so heavily encumbered that there might be nothing

for Sir Ralph to leave to his daughter or his niece. He could wrestle for his own part with the encroaching poverty. But he had loved the land and the surrounding country for the sake of his ancestors. He had ever been a good landlord, caring for the interests of his tenants. And it was a question if he could any longer speak of tenants depending on him. There were, in fact, three sets of people to be considered in a question of this kind —the landlord, the tenants, and the landlord's creditor. It would be a question for the future whether the landlord's creditor would be harder on the tenants than the landlord. For the latter was a man of straw, existing only in the name. It would certainly have been better to have no property at all than the miserable parings which were, after all, his sole inheritance; he was thankful for the first time that there was no heir to carry on the family name.

More than once during this sad soliloquy his fair-haired niece, with the roses blooming on her cheeks, and eyes of the softest Norwegian

blue—true and tender, with long dark lashes—had looked anxiously into the room. But he sent her away somewhat sternly, for the very reason that his heart was yearning over her, and that he had not the courage to inform the girl of the state of his affairs. In his honesty he was most anxious to pay off certain creditors, but to do so he must be involved still further in the clutches of the outlandish neighbour who was the real owner of nearly all that surrounded him. Ralph Rashleigh clenched his fist and brought it heavily to bear on the desk which, till lately, had hidden the much-detested papers, as he muttered to himself,

'Who would have dreamt that the fellow could first of all spin his web with such precaution, like a spider to catch a fly? And then that he would come near to us—he of all others, when he knows that the greater part of the land is *his*?'

He was almost ready to curse the strange luck which had caused the mortgages to be nearly all purchased by one man, and he a stranger, and to think his father was to blame

for placing them so unreservedly at his disposal. Further thought made him realise how irrational was this bitterness, and acknowledge that the lawyers who were entrusted with the sale could not pick and choose their purchasers, and that if one man—living abroad and having a fancy for the thing—had come forward through his agents on each occasion, never quarrelling with the price, they had no alternative but to sell.

Was it instinct or was it suspicion which made Sir Ralph conjecture, as perhaps his father had conjectured on the fatal morning, that something was wrong, and that the freehandedness which was so eccentric in this fellow might possibly be harmful?

Sir Ralph's own keen sensitiveness made him nervously aware of some steady and possibly baneful purpose in the transaction from which his own finer nature revolted. How long his melancholy reverie might have continued is doubtful. It was suddenly interrupted by another tap at the door, and a merry little ten-year-old child, so small as to resemble a

large wax doll, with dark brown eyes looking black through the long lashes, surmounted by a curly fringe, and a crape dress fancifully cut so as to display to full advantage the graceful little legs, daintily encased in black silk stockings, ran into the room, and, taking no rebuff, leaped like a small fairy on her father's knee.

'Whatever happens, my Dot, nothing shall harm thee,' said the father, laying a caressing hand on the glossy dark hair, and looking as if he were half relieved from his burden as he glanced at the sparkling eyes and red lips of the little one.

'It was Vere who sent me,' said the child, stroking his face with loving action in return. 'She said you had been too much alone.'

The cloud returned to his face.

'Vere,' he muttered, 'the girl knows too much. It is bad enough for men to be annoyed by things of this sort—but—*women*——'

PART III.

Say not no to such a suitor,
All I ask is—bless mine, purest of ambitions,
Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free, and happy.
BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

It was the 'eights' week at Oxford.

It is needless to say that the unique city, with its host of historical memories—set in by moist green fields and stately trees in the angle formed by the junction of the Cherwell and the Isis—is more beautiful than usual, like its sister university, in the month of May. In the lonely walks of the college gardens, the flame-coloured pyrus, the sprays of the wistaria adorning the old walls, the laburnums beginning to drop their 'wells of gold,' and the opening lilac-blossoms, hanging like plumes upon the bushes, were lighting up the dignified solitudes with brilliancy of colour. While some old chestnuts with wide-spreading branches—under whose

shadow perhaps a Heber, a Keble, or divines and scholars of earlier renown, had nursed high thoughts or meditated noble deeds—were putting forth their leafy fans, hidden so long within the shining buds.

The genius of university life has changed, let us acknowledge, in most respects for the better. And nothing on this afternoon in May could be more significant of the changes which have revolutionised Oxford, identifying it with the entire English nation, instead of limiting it to certain sections, than the appearance of the crowds of bustling, well-dressed, happy-looking people who were hurrying down Corn-Market Street in the direction of Christchurch. If the 'Philistine' element did not preponderate, it was pretty clearly to be traced in a good many faces of the fathers, mothers, sisters, and friends who seemed, as they streamed through the town, completely to destroy the quasi-monastic appearance of the ancient walls and buildings. They were merry enough as they crowded down the 'avenue' on their way to the barges, but few among them took heed of the beautiful

openings between the trees, or the distant vistas of scenery.

A cynic might have grumbled at the 'aggressive juvenility' of some of the youths who were entering for their minor Olympian stakes, with almost as much excitement as if it were that more important race which—as a subject of newspaper chronicling and speculation—ranks only second to the Derby day. And if the atmosphere of jollity seemed to have little in common with the mediævalism so eloquently described by Matthew Arnold, and said still to linger in dreamy precincts and sequestered nooks, it might have pleased Mr. Ruskin as a proof that there is no decadence in our national love of sport.

It had been raining warm, soft showers that morning. But the rain had only left the spring verdure at its freshest and best. The sky had cleared, and there were cool whispers of soft breezes stirring the leaves of some of the trees in the narrower and more beautiful walks, where lazy undergraduates, 'clad all in virgin white,' had been indulging themselves by sleep-

ily reclining at the bottoms of their punts, listening to the 'soft, sweet pipings' of birds in

> '. . . glades all haunted by grey rains,
> And footfalls of the falling shower.'

A little while afterwards they were routed from their lairs by the more industrious of their comrades, as the barges became thronged with anxious spectators, and the boats for their races started, the various inmates trying to look as if they were quite superior to the consciousness of the becoming nature of their costumes. Mothers and sweethearts, not so reticent, murmured to each other their approval of the pale blue, the pretty pink, the mauve and white, the magenta, or the bright scarlet, as the case might be. In a short time the excitement commenced. Why describe a spectacle known to so many who have carried memories with them through life of such spring days?

'One is not always young,' as a smiling, match-making matron confided to another mother, in excuse for the very evident flirtation of Kate and Jennie with James and Harry, whom 'they might never see again,' as, a minute afterwards, she sentimentally added,

sharp enough to notice that James had offered a bunch of daffodils to Kate, which the latter, with pink cheeks, was pinning to her dress.

Had she not made great exertions to secure a place for herself and her girls on the 'Varsity barge, or, failing that, on one of the college barges which were ranged in a row, and to-day were looking more gay than usual; and had she not wished it were possible to intrigue in some way with the weather, knowing that the spring toilette which she had taken such pains to secure for her girls would make them look all the prettier if they could throw off the wraps which had been rendered necessary by the rain, and a lingering sharpness in the May wind, telling of a recent severity in the weather. Ah! let us not be too cynical on the weak short-sightedness of all such manœuvres, for, as another lady observed with a sigh, 'It is not always May,' as memories recurred to her of her own young days, and a miserable climax to such plotting in her own particular case.

Close to them was a third mother, a Mrs. Vernon-Smith, who had stinted her ill-dressed, pale-looking girls that every farthing that could

be spared from the merest necessities of life should go to young Hayward Vernon-Smith, not that he should achieve success in the schools or fit himself for any calling whatever, but win for himself a place in the university eight—a circumstance which was about as likely to take place as that the cow in the old nursery rhyme should jump over the moon. Only that very morning Mr. Vernon-Smith had informed his better-half that she had made a fool of herself in pinching the family for the superstition of a college education for her spoilt darling, when Mary Ann had been ordered port wine, and they could not afford to give it to her, and the 'young dog' was as likely to be as great a stick at rowing as at classics and mathematics.

Poor Mrs. Smith had too high an opinion of her offspring to be daunted by these insinuations, but her hand shook and her heart misgave her, as the parasols which had been raised to shelter some of the young faces from a glint of sunshine were as suddenly lowered, and the boats were shooting past before the ner-

vous lady thoroughly understood which were her son's colours and what all the excitement was about.

Poor Mrs. Smith positively closed her eyes, as the boats with their stalwart figures seemed to swim before her dazzled vision. She afterwards declared that she had seen the pink and violet caps of the Balliol and New College men, with the scarlet of Magdalen—the athletic forms looking to good advantage as they shot past the barges with a clean and even sweep of their oars. But she could not look at the Exeter boat in which her own son was stroke, knowing that this race bore the same analogy to the greater race which she coveted for her boy, as the Bath races bear to Ascot. She heard nothing but a rush of feet on the banks, deafening shouts, 'Well done, New,'—'Well done, Exeter,' and cries of half the names of the colleges, after which she seemed to wake again to hear that her boy's boat had been 'bumped' to a more ignominious place on the river.

'And the last day too,' said somebody near her, who seemed to have an interest in the

same boat. 'They say that stroke lost his head.'

'Do you hear that, ma?' asked Mary Ann, not altogether sorry to retort on her mother, 'I always told you he would never do it. Why, he lost his head in the same way when we wanted him to take the poker and go down to attack the thief. I heard somebody saying that they should never have a stroke who is liable to loss of nerve, and who hasn't a good lot of stay.'

Mrs. Smith was too crushed to put down her daughter with the spirit which she usually showed when Mary Ann opposed her. Terrible recollections of Hayward's 'Battells' which had amounted to so much more for the last term than she expected, that she could scarcely now summon courage to tell his father, made her silent and absent-minded.

But Hayward Vernon-Smith was not the only man disappointed.

'Well, Sellwood,' said a friend, about half an hour afterwards to a disconsolate-looking man who was walking home with the crowd, and

speaking to no one, 'you did not do as well as we expected.'

'I never do,' was the reply. 'I ought to have been firm enough not to have rowed at all, coming just at this time. I have made a worse mess of my "Greats" in consequence.'

'But it does not matter to *you*,' was the answer.

Sellwood shrugged. If he could have spoken his secret thoughts, he would have said that was the pity of it. If he had ever had any relation to encourage him, and to care if he made a success or not, instead of being simply told to make friends and to spend an unlimited amount of money—he might have done better in everything.

They were going with the multitude past the beautiful Christchurch meadows. Even the fools who had just struggled out of the water, having upset their boats from the desire to distinguish themselves, had more friends after all than he had, in spite of his father's urgent messages that he would ensure for himself brilliant

acquaintances who would be useful to him in his future life.

There was scarcely a soul whom he cared for in all this crowd. What a motley throng of people it was streaming up the far-famed walk, whilst now at every Christchurch window, over banks of flowers, peeped out young faces, merry, critical, or even cynical, as the case might be, but few of them jaundiced with the midnight oil. He thought a little bitterly, as he glanced up at them, that these were the swells with whom his father would have liked him to be thick, and that it was a contemptible thing, altogether lowering to a man's self-respect, to be commanded to 'make friends' with any persons, as if such friendships would be of material advantage to his future. It seemed to him that his father must be of an uncommonly sanguine disposition to persist in still clinging to the vague hope that he would attach himself to sprigs of the nobility, when evidently his own antecedents would not bear inspection, and no one but a madman would expect money to do everything. In fact, God-

frey Sellwood's only objection to the dark, energetic, well-knit young fellow who was now walking by his side, and whose appearance bore a marked contrast to his own fair-haired, fair-skinned, and somewhat graceful but languid face, was that Charles Lloyd was an Honourable and the younger son of a lord. Charles was a marked contrast to him in every way. Bright and brilliant in his manner, with all the confidence which came to him from the fact that he was well-born if not particularly well-provided in this world's goods, he had not only found Godfrey a valuable ally, always ready with money for every conceivable thing, but a sympathetic friend. For, as he acknowledged to himself, Sellwood—whose connections were probably 'fishy,' from the fact, that though he mentioned a father, the 'old boy' had never shown himself, and was therefore probably unpresentable—had as much of the manners and tone of real gentlefolk as if he had been accustomed to mix with them from his infancy.

Why Sellwood had not done more was a mystery not only to Lloyd but to most people.

Great things had been prophesied of him when he was a freshman at St. Anne's. But it could not be said that he had verified any of these prophecies. He had begun well by standing pretty high in an examination for the Hertford, though he himself always declared that the 'mention' was owing to a lucky hit. He certainly went-in for the Ireland, and was nowhere at all, though his Greek was generally better than his Latin, and though 'he,' as Charles Lloyd was wont to remark, with the repetition of a hackneyed joke, 'was born with no natural aversion to that wretched Aristotle who wrote his horrid philosophy on purpose to *stagger* men with wits, or that over-estimated Plato with whom most folks were dinned till they were quite as ready to swallow poison as ever Socrates was.'

'No, it looked a little fishy,' that friend was wont to declare, with the usual candour of friends, 'that Sellwood actually stood well for the Hertford in his first year, and then went-in and did nothing the next. Somehow he lost his first in "Mods," and after that he got dis-

gusted with the whole thing, and found out, as I could have told him before, that classical education was all a mistake. Why, it makes one shudder to think, if there had not been a bonfire of that Alexandrian library, there would have been a lot more red-ink lines and wretched notes for us to make.'

That was Charlie's explanation of his friend's apparent failure, and probably it was not so far from the truth. After the discovery that classical education was a mistake, Sellwood had taken a little to the sports. He was a 'fair bat,' a 'fair oar,' but not absolutely good at either. Probably because he did not take the pains, and preferred lying lazily on his back, and reading poetry in one of those hiding-places amongst the grasses, to be discovered beside the little Cherwell before it falls into the Isis. Punting on a summer's day in a white flannel suit involves no great exertion of strength, and seemed to be congenial to Godfrey Sellwood's retiring nature. There were occasions, however, on which he could emerge from his ordinary shyness, and he had even been known to

give hints to his friend, Charlie Lloyd, when the latter was preparing his brilliant speeches for the Union.

But even at the Union Sellwood had not distinguished himself. His delivery was that of a man who was struggling with his ideas, thinking, as it were, the thought over and over again, and labouring to clothe it with such expression as should represent it to his fellows. Nor did it add to his popularity that, though words were not always ready with him, he was fastidious about their right use, and quick to detect the weak part of an epigram, or the confusion of metaphors—marring the construction of some high-sounding sentence, which, picked to pieces, could be proved to mean nothing at all. Unlike the Honourable Charles (who was accused of having 'ratted' in his political creed since he came to Oxford, his family traditions having been in favour of Toryism, whilst the majority of the more original speakers were Radicals), Sellwood seldom changed his opinions, and clung to ideas which he had formed from boyhood with

a tenacity unusual for one so young. He seldom volunteered a remark in company unless he had something to say. And, although he had joined the debating club,—where the grave questions of whether Mr. Disraeli was or was not a traitor to his country, and whether the Oxford youth should lend its patronage to Church and State, were discussed and settled with a vehemence which was perfectly innocent, and proved a whetstone for sharpening wits,—he never made more than one speech of any length. A speech which led to the report that he not only stammered, but had something wrong in his bronchial arrangements, when, after all, he was merely nervous, merely in search of the right words.

In company he had been somewhat silent, having no taste for wines or breakfast-parties, not intending to be unsocial, but preferring the friendship of a few. Perhaps the natural indolence of his constitution, which made it somewhat hard for him to exert himself to overcome obstacles, had much to do with this love of retirement; perhaps it was that the hurry

and fulness of modern life, the crowd of fresh thoughts, the new discoveries in science, and the desire to grapple with the problems of his age, were together somewhat overpowering to a man of his temperament, and he required to realise them in solitude.

Alone with young Lloyd he was perfectly at his ease. The 'burden of the mystery' of life ceased to oppress him, and the crux of how to reconcile religion and politics, looking upon them as one, could for a time be put on one side. The two friends were each moved in different ways by the '*Zeit-geist*,' though they might interpret it in a different manner. They enjoyed their battles-royal, their skirmishes of words which did not become seriously warlike, for both at heart were Radicals, with a natural love for social equality and a desire to meet others on the same level and enter into their grievances. It mattered little by what party names they called themselves. The truest statesman, Conservative or not, must have sympathised with their burning enthusiasm to snap Gordian knots which their fathers had tried to untie in

vain, whilst he might have smiled a little sadly at their somewhat crude impatience to set right those complicated social problems, whether of land, property, or national health which had baffled many and harder heads. It was the desire for brotherhood and comradeship which was the hopeful element in their case. And though it pleased Charlie Lloyd to draw back on occasions, or to make a great deal of the few questions on which he had thought it desirable to give out that he had changed his opinions, with a pugnacity that was pertinacious, this was all the more invigorating.

'I shall come up to your rooms for coffee, after hall to-night,' said the latter with a nod, as the two men separated in High Street, Godfrey Sellwood turning into the quadrangle of St Anne's, and Charlie Lloyd crossing over to —— college, with its queer Dutch windows to the chapel, and its Common room where old Sam Johnson, according to his boast, had sometimes 'drunk off three bottles of port without being the worse for it.'

CHAPTER II.

CHARLIE LLOYD did not 'look in' quite so early that evening as he had promised, a matter which did not cause Godfrey much surprise. For was not Lloyd one of the most popular men at Oxford; not a 'fast' man in the ordinary sense, but up to all the fun which was going on; not a wine-bibber to any serious extent, but the life of a wine-party? Was it not the ambition of many, who found it difficult to maintain their own standing in a place which shifted its population every three years, to be seen arm-in-arm as if they were on the closest terms of intimacy with this well-looking, well-born young fellow, who took his social 'honours' in a way which was peculiar to himself.

Godfrey was not in the best of spirits as he sat alone waiting for him in his picturesque room, which was one of the finest in the quadrangle, large if low-roofed, and with cushioned window-seats commanding a peaceful view of an old moss-grown churchyard, on which the setting sun had but a short time before cast its golden rays. The stars were coming out now, and Godfrey, who had chosen to dine alone—with his dinner laid by a solemn scout, who looked as if he himself had graduated in all the learning of the university—now retired from the window, and seated himself in a cozy arm-chair by his reading-lamp.

It was before the modern revival of domestic art, when 'æstheticism' as it is called, could be paraded as an excuse for organized attacks on the persons of undergraduates, who burn incense or worship peacock's-feathers. It did not occur to Godfrey to have lilies in his room and to offer reverence to them more than to other flowers. But flowers were crowded together in profusion on one of his tables, simply because he cared for those beautiful things

which seem to be born of the air and the sunshine almost as much as the tints of the rainbow, and had given orders to his scout to see that he was always to be supplied with them. Of course he was cheated about the prices for them, as he was about most things. But, as his father wished him to make a sensation by spending as much money as possible on the Oxford tradespeople, this was a matter of no consequence. Godfrey was fleeced with impunity, but the 'sensation' was far off still.

All that could be said in excuse of this lavish expenditure was that his room was furnished with scholarly taste. Of old china, which was one of the lad's hobbies, there was a plentiful supply (not of plates, as now, crawling up the walls, or hanging from the ceiling in a way to make nervous people feel as if they are standing beneath so many swords of Damocles) but of vases standing on the floor, of various sizes and beautiful shapes. There were pictures, exquisitely selected, of water-colour and oil on the walls, with a few rare line engravings. A glass lamp of artistic design (where now there

would be a Japanese one) was suspended from the ceiling; and a piano with a finely carved case (it had not occurred to Godfrey to fling an Indian scarf over it) stood open with a violin near it, and some of Mendelssohn's and Beethoven's music on the stand. In one corner of the room there was a trophy of pipes, and musical instruments, amongst which was a Syrian drum. Godfrey was a member of a glee club which on the previous evening had performed for a temperance society. They had chosen Mendelssohn's vintage song, as peculiarly appropriate for the occasion, and had entered it on the programme as 'Selections from Lorelei.'

Side by side with the defects in the young fellow's nature were many high qualities—keenness of perception, a temperament yielding readily to culture, an organisation as acutely sensitive to changes in the social atmosphere as his musical ear was fine to changes of sound, an inclination to choose employments which were congenial to him, and a retiring tendency which perhaps might have been inherited from

his mother, or perhaps was a result of his peculiar education. To those skilful appraisers of character who pride themselves on cataloguing a man or a woman according to their surroundings in the rooms which they generally inhabit,—forgetting that such things may be studied even when they appear most careless—it would have been easy to form a tolerably accurate estimate of the versatility of Godfrey Sellwood. His very books told a tale. English literature figured largely as well as German and French, threatening to outnumber the conventional Latin and Greek. And amongst them were rare editions of the best illustrated literature of the day, and a splendidly bound copy of Turner's 'Liber Studiorum,' for which he was said to have given an almost fabulous price. Probably if the lad had been poor, or if he had had relations to be interested in his success, he might have made a speciality of one of his many gifts. But as he sat with his slippers on, waiting for Lloyd to come in and have one of his usual talks, and as he watched his own thoughts as it were in a cloud

of curling smoke (having no aunt, cousin, or sister to inform him that smoking was an illicit practice), the provoking part of it was that he saw as plainly as anyone else could have told him, how—because his wages had been a free gift to him, and he had had nothing to stimulate him—he had been too lazy to do anything.

'Put your Irishman in a free cottage, with lots of potatoes to eat, and he'll never rise any higher,' he said to himself—that being one of the questions under dispute between himself and young Lloyd, which one or the other was going to settle for the good of the community.

'Now it was the Pater's mistake to keep me like a prince, when he himself probably worked hard enough in his time.' The shifting of the responsibility in this way on 'the Pater,' led him for the hundredth time into another reverie. Why, if there was anything in the doctrine of heredity, did he and 'the Pater,' have so little in common? His father made no secret of having sprung from the people, and seemed at times to be proud of it.

According to Godfrey's theories it *was* a thing to be proud of—a self-made man had nothing to be ashamed of. But why was there a mystery? Why did his father seem to have positively no connections? His own experience of the first year of his university training had furnished him with an acute instinct which advised him of the impossibility of attempting to introduce people to each other, in the case of the one set being refined, and the other utterly unpresentable. But not only did the young blood in him rise in a sort of scorn against any such meanness as that which disallows honest kith and kin for the sake of a little inconvenience happening to oneself; he was confronted with another difficulty. He could just remember his mother in some foreign country, a pale delicate woman, rather crushed and feeble, but apparently with all the habits of a lady.

As far as he could recall it, his mother had never had reason to complain of ill-treatment. She had simply been neglected, and his fear was that she had died, as some plants do, from

the absence of light and sunshine. She could not presumably have had anything in common with the stern, self-reliant man who treated her with deferential politeness, but had apparently centred his attentions on his child. In this case it had not been the usual cause and effect of love begetting love. The young fellow was inclined bitterly to resent, for his mother's sake, a course of conduct which it seemed to him was lowering to womanhood in general. That he himself should be valued was of small importance to him. He knew nothing about his father's antecedents. He did not even know the extent of his fortune, nor did Reuben become more communicative as his son grew up. His father's reputation as a business man had apparently been without a stain. He made a point of keeping his word with his servants and dependents, and, so far as Godfrey knew, he had never wronged a single person. His actions might be a trifle less hard than his words to the people who were beneath him, but words and actions were both hard enough. How would he and his father 'hit it off' when

they happened to come together, seeing that they held different opinions about nearly everything under the sun? He had tried to put off the evil day as long as possible, but now it was close upon him.

Godfrey's soliloquy was interrupted by a sharp, quick rap at the door of his room.

'Come in,' he said, not sorry to hear the rap, and to welcome the brisk man with the big forehead, bright expression of face, and clear brown eyes, whose company was always welcome to him. 'Hullo, Lloyd! you won't find most people in the world as patient as I am—coffee gone cold.'

'I don't expect to find many as dreamy,' answered the other. 'No, not that thing with the carved back; I broke it the last time I was here,' he continued, pushing away the high-backed chair, and flinging himself down on the sofa. 'You are like Carlyle, you know—quite superior to time and space, and all those world-enveloping appearances.'

'Space!' said the other, interrogatively, as he looked, in his meditative way, at the

smoke from his cigar. 'I'm not a ghost yet.'

'Yes, you are—a ghost in a body. But you, with your riches, can reduce to a minimum the inconvenience of that body. You can travel almost as quickly as Puck, if it so pleases you; whilst I, poor wretch, a younger son, and not being afflicted with the chronic malady of too many thousands, am doomed to be content with Lincoln's Inn, celibacy, and the Bar.'

'The Bar?' rejoined Sellwood, to whom the information was new. 'So you have made up your mind? It's a road that begins seductively, and ends—where?'

'Well, it leads to most things.'

'To those who win.'

Hitherto Charlie Lloyd, with all his expansiveness, had had a certain shyness about his plans for the future, with which his friends did not interfere. At one time he had planned to remain at Oxford, but academic life began to pall upon him, and he longed for a wider arena, directly it was found that he had taken a degree which was not so good as had been expected.

'I mean to win,' he responded, with his brightest smile. 'Of course there'll be lots of snubbings to which one has not been used, but they are good for the moral constitution—and there's a chance of being left by the receding tide.'

'High and dry, like some of the rubbish left behind from a wreck. No, that will be quite impossible for *you*,' answered Sellwood, with a shake of the head, and looking at him with approving eyes.

'Well, I must take my chance of it; it's a refuge for the destitute, the best I can get. After all, it's the political life which has most temptation for me.'

'A future representative of your country,' answered Godfrey, with a smile; 'you must change your ideas a little before that time comes.'

'I must be a disciple of patience, to say the least of it,' answered the other, with a sigh, 'wedded to my ink-bottle and musty law-books for the——'

'Doubtful hope of becoming a Q.C.,' interrup-

ted Sellwood, waking into life and throwing away the end of his now finished cigar, 'oh, you won't see much of the chambers in which you will be supposed to spend your life—there will be balls, and dinners, and conversaziones, or whatever else you call them, and then you have your eye upon politics. Good! You will fight your battles and succeed in them as you succeed in everything you take up. You have the power of concentration—ay, and of fascination too—the fates have denied them both to me. It will be simply for you to go in and win in literature and everything else, just as you have won at the debates here in a certain sense—though you have talked a lot of bosh—you were made for success.'

'Stop, my good fellow—if it's the literature, the cutting language, and anonymous vivisection of the review which is to deprive some poor devil of an author of this night's rest, I should say it was a precious deal more in your line than mine.'

'I—I have made a mull of everything. My "Greats" are sure to be mulled, and I spoilt the

chances of our boat because I had not the courage to say "no" about attempting both. No, I am off at once. I feel half ashamed to show my face.'

'Don't you wait for Commem?'

'Why should I? If the jokes were worth anything—but they are sure to be stale as well as noisy. It's not quite so bad as it used to be when the noise was like the row in a theatre on Boxing-night. But one can still read in the newspapers about the 'man in the straw hat.' They have established a precedent to let the fellows make fools of themselves, and precedents in my opinion are always a mistake.'

'Not *always*,' answered Lloyd. In spite of being impregnated with the young reforming spirit which likes to sweep away old abuses and to introduce anything new—speculating a little too rashly and perhaps too familiarly on all sorts of subjects hitherto supposed to be unassailable—Charlie Lloyd had, as I have hinted before, his own little reserves on which the popular Iconoclasm was not to be exercised. 'I can't agree with you,' he continued, with his

usual combativeness, springing to his feet as if ready for a battle. 'Precedents are not *always* a mistake. For instance, the law of primogeniture is a capital one, though I would not stand in my brother's shoes for something, I can tell you.'

'A good many other people would,' answered Sellwood, who was too much out of spirits to take up the glove which he knew had been flung down to him for championship.'

'They wouldn't if they knew all. Call a lord free? Why, he is a slave—the puppet of the people—ten times less free than the peasant who earns enough and no more for his daily meals.'

Sellwood simply shrugged his shoulders at this outburst, and lit another cigar, while his friend—now standing on his feet with his brown eyes sparkling and looking so much like a young war-horse scenting the battle, that Godfrey almost expected to see his ears go up and his nostrils dilate—went on, as if expecting to be contradicted.

'Free! Why, I'm the free one. I assure you

I feel sometimes when I am with Newderry as if I have an air of quite impertinent independence. It is he who has to sacrifice himself for the good of his country—his very name and the way in which people look at him is an infliction——'

'Only to be borne by one of a great nature,' said Sellwood, drily.

'Ah, yes; why, when they see us together, the very cut of his clothes and the set of his necktie become matters for criticism—*he* can hardly ever look right, that's because they whisper, "Look at him, he's the lord." Would you expect a lord to be short, or at all mean in appearance? The *ὁι πολλοὶ* say no, and condemn Newderry accordingly. If the poor wretch is tired they shake their heads and say "dissipated," while as for me I'm let off lightly—"that's his brother, you know, nothing."'

'You're always let off lightly.'

'I'm used to it, you see, from the time I used to play football, and, not having enough weight to be a "forward," learned to slip in between the fellows' arms and legs like an eel. But

between ourselves, you know, I expect they'll alter a good deal of all this by-and-by. When lords get sick of state and long for a seat in the lower Parliament where they can express themselves with better effect—it may be only a feather, yet it shows——'

'That a tedious parade of greatness begins to pall on them?' said Sellwood, interrogatively. From long habit he had been accustomed to finish young Lloyd's disjointed sentences, who, also from habit, expected it of him.

Both men were well aware that this conversation on an old topic which was pretty well threadbare, was kept up with a show of excitement on Charlie's part, purposely to ward off another undebateable subject which was uppermost in the minds of both. For as soon as Lloyd had heard, a few weeks before, that Sellwood's father had settled in ——shire he had invited himself, as a matter of course, to spend a portion of his summer holiday at Broadmeads, and had met with a discouragement. Now without any vulgar fawning upon wealth, Charlie Lloyd was unaffectedly fond of Sell-

wood, and the latter was too good and useful a friend to be easily lost sight of.

Yet Sellwood was now leaving Oxford for good. He, on his own part, had declined Lloyd's offers of hospitality with a decision which could not fail to cause surprise; and now, while etiquette forbade that Lloyd should again introduce the subject of his own proffered visit to Broadmeads, Sellwood remained stubbornly silent.

The latter suffered acutely in maintaining a silence which he knew would be misinterpreted. For, if Lloyd cared for him, he cared ten times more for Lloyd; his being one of those deep-hearted, sensitive natures, whose loyalty is unobtrusive and whose love was 'passing the love' of—well, at any rate, of *some* women. No sour envy had been allowed to mar the good-will which Godfrey had ever felt for his more popular and prosperous friend. To part from him would be one of the keenest trials of his life. If the two friends were to be torn apart, it was Sellwood's nature and not Lloyd's which would be left bleeding at the pith. And yet,

when Charlie Lloyd broke off in his rattling speech, there was an awkward pause for a minute. In that minute Sellwood had for the last time turned it over in his mind and decided—he *could not* ask Lloyd to come to Broadmeads —he *could not* introduce him to his father.

'What a strange and yet universal law it seems, that other people's lots in life always appear to us better than our own,' he said, a little wearily, by way of breaking the silence. 'This rank, you think, and these vested interests—with which I cannot say I sympathise—bring their own curse. Very likely, but how much greater is the curse of being a sort of social pariah. Do not think I am not proud of the fact that no blood but that of the people runs in my veins. I have often said so, but to have no one belonging to one with whom one can——'

It was like himself to stammer a little, but unlike himself to leave his sentence in his turn unfinished; probably to regret that he had commenced it. Lloyd gave him a rapid glance, which he immediately regretted, as the colour sprang to the Saxon face, and spread to the

roots of the fair hair, though Sellwood still preserved his meditative attitude.

'Surely you would never misunderstand me like that,' flashed out the quick-spoken Charlie, —with about as much thought as when he had ventured a celebrated simile concerning the 'pendulum of liberty going jog-trot on the plains of time'—'We've been too close friends, you and I, for our friendship to be allowed to—'

'Allowed to what?' asked Sellwood, with his brightest smile, whilst Charlie, unassisted, muttered something about the 'absurdity of being influenced by a hair's breadth of difference here and there in social distinctions.'

'Getting to your weights and pendulums once more?' asked Godfrey. 'Are you going to tell me again "You are one of those people who walk through life on a ladder of paradox," or "You and I are like two mill-stones, grinding one another away till we become like Kilkenny cats"?'

And both men were not sorry to break out into one of those hearty laughs which made the parting between them easier.

CHAPTER III.

MEANWHILE it could not be said that matters went on smoothly between the owners of Broadmeads and Rashleigh Park.

'They are neighbours,' said the Torringmoor people, 'but *so* uncongenial.'

Sir Ralph was low-spirited and wretched; the wrinkles began to show deeply on his pallid face. Other men, less fastidious, might have fonnd some way of wriggling out of the network with which he had been so skilfully surrounded, but the baronet was too honourable about debt to avail himself of the numerous plans for evading his increasing difficulties which modern subtlety might have suggested. Having

a conscience which would reproach him for devising means of escape of which other men would not have been ashamed, he tried to think of it as a morbid thing which had done him an ill turn. But the conscience stood firmly in spite of his efforts to be free to it, and he could only vent his vexation on those around him. Misfortune had been to Sir Ralph no sweetener of the temper. He had passed through much suffering in his life, and the suffering had been all the more terrible because it had been quiet, but it had left its marks on him nevertheless.

He showed these marks more than usual on one evening towards the end of May, when he was sitting alone in his study with a pile of papers before him, and with a very traceable likeness to some of his ancestors whose portraits decorated the walls of the room, and who seemed to stare at him with surprise and disapproval.

The impossibility of spending any extra shillings on keeping up the necessary repairs of the house was noticeable from the state of those paintings, as well as that of the tapestry-

covered arm-chair on which Sir Ralph was reclining, and which bore many signs of the depredations of moths, the horsehair protruding unpleasantly in several places. The portraits were cracked and faded, displaying the canvas here and there. Some of the worthies had received injuries to their noses, and others to their eyes; but all stared, and some smiled with cold equanimity. The sadness and solitude of the night, the dull light of the wax candles which were burning low in their sockets, and the funereal company of his ancestors, were overcoming Sir Ralph with the melancholy which had been too constantly his companion of late—when he gave a scarcely perceptible start. He was too accustomed to his niece's noiseless tread to be much surprised when he saw that Vere was standing near him. She often glided into the room with a determination to resist his cynicism, though he sometimes resented her intrusion.

'Uncle, it is late, and you are bothering yourself again about those stupid letters,' she said, trying to speak merrily, but with a little

catch in her breath which proved that the effort of intruding upon his privacy had cost her something.

Hers was not one of those weak natures which acquiesce in all that is arranged for them. On the contrary, an energy which was unconquerable, and a will which was capable of endurance, might have been discerned by a skilled physiognomist in her firm lips and steadfast eyes. The face, if it was not exactly bright, because it had a look of care in it scarcely natural for one so young, was softened by an expression of pitying tenderness, as she stood gazing down upon him with her fair hair thrown into vivid relief by the dark oak panelling of the old room. She could deny herself willingly for those whom she loved, though subjection of a slavish sort would have been impossible to her.

But it was characteristic of Sir Ralph, and in keeping with his chronic state of petulant dissatisfaction, that he not only noticed with a pang of disapproval the dark-stuff dress trimmed

with rusty crape, when he would have liked to see folds of some delicate muslin, just open to display the white gleaming of her neck; but that he told himself the bright flush which went and came with the varying emotions of the speaker, and the unusual lustre of the blue eyes, were due to the ——shire climate—an evanescent lustre of flesh and blood, a mere glory of colour for which a skilful judge would prophesy a very limited duration.

'She will be nothing to look at in a few years' time, and I cannot afford to bring her out properly. They will say that I neglected poor Richard's child,' he was thinking to himself, as he said aloud, a little querulously,

'How often have I asked you to dress yourself more prettily? The very servants must blame *me*, when they see you going about like that.'

Another girl, proud as himself, might have resented the speech. For she knew that *he* knew, as well as she knew herself, that he had supplied her with no pin-money for pretty

evening toilettes, and that it was only owing to the most dexterous management of domestic details that she was able to keep her little cousin tidy, and supply the wages for the servants.

It was only with a deeper flush and with a tender, little, protective air, gracious all the more because she was homely in her dignity, that she answered him,

'We are in mourning, you know.'

'You are in mourning, but you need not be shabby; there is nothing left for you poor children but the scrag-ends, instead of meat.'

He covered his face with his hand. She did not answer, but drew a chair close to his. She had heard that some people loved each other so well that to be near each other was enough; their love was of the trusting kind, they did not need to speak. And there was a great yearning for love in the heart of this orphan girl, shut out by her poverty and the circumstances of her life from the society which her uncle considered to be suitable for one of her birth, and equally debarred from making friend-

ships with those whom he supposed to be beneath her.

'You ought to be in bed,' he said, after a pause.

'I thought,' she answered, timorously, 'that perhaps I could help you?'

'About what?' (a little sharply)

'About those—letters.'

'Have I not told you again and again that women have nothing to do with business?'

'But you know what the doctors say, and, if your heart is not strong, you ought not surely to be sitting up and worrying yourself in this way.'

'Who dares to say I *worry*? Is it likely that I would degrade myself to be worried—actually *worried*—by the little gnat-like stings of that pettifogging creature who has come to live near us? They say he is reserved—*reserved* indeed—when he is always troubling me with his vulgar, interfering letters. He knows that I do not keep an agent, and so he takes advantage to write like one of those people who have risen and who do not know the manners of

gentlemen. Our estates, forsooth, join each other, and he has unlimited resources at his command. So at one time he complains of that tower in our grounds, because, forsooth, it obstructs his view; at another he advises me to thin my timber, because it interferes with a free current of air so that it cannot be good for myself; and at another it is that a pond should be drained, and then he talks nonsense about sanitary commissioners. The fussy, restless interference of these people who are nobodies, just because they happen to have made a little money! There—I will show you my answers, if you care to look at them—I have kept copies,' and he pushed them before her.

She read,

'It is nonsense to suppose that you must build up a high wall, because our old summer-house —called the Tower—overlooks your grounds. The Tower is rarely used and has stood there for more than a hundred years. If you were to consult the antiquarians, you would hear that some of them think its foundations date from the seventeenth century. It would be madness

to pull it down, while if you build a wall it will be greater folly to shut out my air and impede my view.'

And again,

'I can by no means agree with you as to the propriety of denying the people the right of way, which they have had ever since I can remember, in a footpath through the park. We Rashleighs have always prided ourselves on conceding these privileges to the poor. It is not *my* fault that the increasing numbers on the estate have to toil in a state of squalor from year to year, since these have no longer the monopoly of poverty. But while many of their wants might be neutralised by prompt attention on the part of a really rich man like yourself,—the actual owner of a large part of the property—I consider it a piece of selfish interference to deny the poor a right which they have always had.'

'Oh, uncle, I don't think that will exactly do,' remonstrated Vere, 'do you think it wise to irritate him like that?'

'He irritates *me*,' said Sir Ralph, angrily.

'These nonsensical, caddish *nouveaux-riches* are always interfering with that "longing for confirmed tranquillity" which, if you had come to my age, child, you would "know," as Wordsworth said, "to be one of the inherent wants of humanity."'

An outsider would have seen the humorous side in the disputes which were ever cropping up between the combatants, with the victory remaining undecided. More than once the two neighbours had met in their walks through the village with no further result than the meeting of two evenly-matched dogs who growl, show their teeth, and after all turn tail without coming to actual encounter.

But Vere looked sufficiently grave as she glanced at the correspondence which had been a fruitful source of sleepless nights to her irritated uncle.

'Fancy the impudence of a fellow,' he continued, 'who could write me such a thing as this, "The trees want thinning on your grounds—the fir-walk especially is in a very bad state." And when I answer, "Thanks, but

my fir-walk pleases me," has the positive insolence to write again, "If you change your mind, and would like to sell your timber, I will offer you a good price for it."'

'Perhaps he knows—' began Vere, and then faltered, fearing the expression on her uncle's face, and unable to finish her speech.

'*Perhaps he knows!*' thundered Sir Ralph. 'If he does, he has no right to brag about it. Depend upon it I know my "Evelyn" on trees fifty times better than he with his vulgar modern theories. I thought you had more spirit, that you resented as much as I do the change in the old country when a beggar's son can be a millionaire and a good old family reduced to beggary. How can you twit me with "perhaps he knows?"'

And he, who had been pacing about the room restlessly, while his niece looked at the letters, now sat down again hopelessly, and covered his face with his hands.

There was nothing more to be done, as Vere knew from sad experience, when once she had blundered on an unfortunate speech. The same

experience had taught her to avoid altercation, and the unfortunate uncle was positively relieved when, on changing his attitude a few minutes afterwards, he found that he was alone.

'She has obeyed me, and gone to bed,' he said to himself. 'She is much more obedient than my own child. I have not much to complain of.'

And then—though the figures were literally dancing before his eyes—he sat down again to his account-book, telling himself that it was his increasing duty to place his affairs before himself without reserve.

It was past one o'clock when he spread another note out before his tired eyes in the handwriting which was so odious to him, and which had been received but the day before from his neighbour. It convinced him that the man, who seemed to have eyes as sharp and arms as far-reaching as the octopus, was aware of a further loss which had happened to him lately—a disaster which he had supposed to be known only to himself.

'I wonder how he, who enjoys a reputation of omnipotence, and who could not endure the slightest reverse, would like to have this sort of patronising letter himself,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. Yet the note might have seemed a kind one to outsiders who knew nothing of the curious relations between the two men.

It closed with offering the Baronet a loan of ten thousand pounds, if he wished to recoup himself for his loss, and was signed, as it seemed to him, in mockery,

'I have the honour to be, your obedient servant, Reuben Sellwood.'

Sir Ralph felt a shiver down his back as he read the words and the signature. Destiny seemed to be against him. He looked round the room, with which he had been so familiarly acquainted since his boyhood, with the unsympathetic ancestors staring down at him, and felt as if he were one of those victims exposed to a peculiar form of torture in the middle ages. For the walls seemed to be slowly advancing and closing in upon him, the floor appeared to be rising, and the ceiling, sinking. He would

soon be crushed between the complex machinery which had been devised to grind him to powder. If he accepted this loan, he would then be more fully than ever in the power of an upstart whom he hated. If he did not accept, he would be in his power still, and some people might consider his refusal to be graceless.

The painful emotions of pride and agony had never been contending more strongly in his heart than when he seized the pen, and humiliated himself by saying what was not true, that he was much obliged for the offer, and asking to be given a few days for reflection before he availed himself of it.

CHAPTER IV.

GODFREY shirked 'Commemoration,' as he had intended, and returned to Broadmeads by the end of May.

Had the lad been returning from South Africa, his father could not have made more pompous preparations to receive him; but, in truth, South Africa or the North Pole would have been all the same to Reuben Sellwood. He had been rather proud than otherwise when his son had shown the slightest tendency towards extravagance.

This had been all very well at a distance. It was years since the father and the son had met, the latter spending his holidays on the

Continent, and the former supplying him with lavish money for his travelling expenses, like a King Log from the other side of the Atlantic.

Godfrey knew little more of his father than if he had been King Log. His childhood still haunted him with a number of shadowy recollections, amongst which he himself—a very white and solemn child with a good deal of individuality and embryonic philosophy—had seemed to creep, a pale little figure, among the shadows.

Few children had lived in a more sunless atmosphere. And yet there had been a sort of uncompromising down-rightness about the boy which made him long to get to the heart of things. A longing which was rather increased than otherwise, when, as Reuben sarcastically expressed it, the lad had taken 'intellectual measles.' Then it was that he found he had nothing in common with the reserved, defiant man, who came across the seas to visit him once when he was at school, who

seemed to have lapsed into an indifference, as bad as the worst forms of cynicism. Godfrey could not know that the indifference was studied; he was only too well aware that his father would try to crush his own inquiring spirit, and that he might as well keep to himself all questions which he was ready to venture respecting his birth-place, and the memories which they might be supposed to share in common.

The two met as if they had been strangers in the new house at Broadmeads on an evening late in May. A dispassionate spectator might have discerned something pathetic in the restrained feeling on either side which manifested itself in the deferential manner of the son, and in the little expressions which escaped him betraying the tenor of his thoughts, and making his father conclude that the lad was fearfully sensitive, just like his mother. Reuben was rather pleased to observe this trait of character, which proved to him that he possessed a piece of Parian marble which would re-

quire more gentle handling than usual, and was quite unconscious that he himself was trembling with some strange repressed feeling, and was scarcely able to articulate at times from excitement. Unknown to himself, he had been queerly anxious about the appearance of his 'poet.' By the light of the flaring gas, which Godfrey mentally likened to that of a first-class waiting-room at a railway station, Reuben saw a tall young fellow with sloping shoulders, a little pale but with features which had been pronounced good by the sex that ought to know, with a build which was slender and muscular, brilliant eyes, and a maturity of forehead which was startling in one so young. He was scarcely familiar with the type, but he looked at him with pride; while the young man himself was relieved to find that his father was not, as he had supposed, vulgar by nature, but was evidently possessed of a good deal of character,

Godfrey was up betimes on the following morning. He escaped from the brand-new house, with the colours which set his teeth on

edge, and even from the pictures which his father had selected, to watch the promise of cloudless splendour in the early dawn, and to console himself for a somewhat sleepless night by listening to the gush of bird-music which filled the pauses of his thoughts, as the first sun-shafts glanced down on the slopes and lawns of freshest grass.

Even then, it was not the newly planted evergreens which attracted him, nor the green-houses, which were full of pyramids of rose-hued azaleas. Instinctively he bent his steps to the oldest part of the park—that which had not been newly planted, but was a part of the property which had originally belonged to the Rashleighs. He had heard nothing of the story, but his fastidious taste was gratified by the grey trunks of the old oak-trees, and the moss-stained boles of the beeches with glimpses between them of far-off reaches of the river. Beyond the river was the purple moorland melting away into the distance, and from an old gate which led away from his father's grounds, could be seen the roofs of cottages

and orchards with clustering trees still bearing here and there traces of lingering blossom. Something of easy grace in his son's attitude caught Reuben's eye, as he hurried up to him, and saw him leaning against the gate.

'Well?' he said to him, with a well pleased smile. 'Pleased with the prospect? I thought as much. By-and-by you will be monarch of all you survey.'

He forgot himself a little, and rubbed his hands. Something in the action, as well as the quotation which betrayed the direction of his father's thoughts, jarred on the young man's mood. He shifted his attitude a little impatiently, and made no longer an attractive foreground to the picture, as he answered,

'Does it not strike you that we can admire things just as well when we don't possess them? It is surely a poverty-stricken and a selfish spirit, which would lead us to appreciate because we can appropriate?'

He regretted the speech as soon as it was uttered, remembering how, in his childhood, his father had never been contradicted, but had

been absolute master in his mother's eyes, just as if they had lived in feudal times. The recollection gave him a pang, when he recalled the figure of his gentle mother who had been apparentely a refined woman, but who had always contented herself with the secondary part, watching carefully for her husband's meaning, glossing over his inaccuracies of speech, and endeavouring so to lead up to his best effects that it seemed to Reuben himself as if he had said a fine thing when he had only uttered some bald truism. The remembrance of the surprising assistance which could be given by a sympathetic wife in doing nothing to irritate an overbearing man, softened Godfrey a little. For his mother's sake he would not wrangle more than he could help over his father's sayings. He would look upon him as much as possible as a diamond, though a rough one, and try to ignore the fact that he and his father were opposed to each other in traditions, ideas, religion—everything.

'I did not mean,' he began, apologetically,

'that it is not a fine thing for a man by his own nervous energy to be able to push on, and make the best of every opportunity. In that sense great wealth may represent great labours and achievements—of course it is in the highest degree honourable.'

'Eh!' said Reuben, to whom these niceties of expression were almost as incomprehensible as if he had been physically deaf—so near is moral deafness to physical—but who had been listening to his son's explanation as if he were hearing some air at the opera. 'I didn't think you could be such a fool as not to appreciate it. Ah! all the good things in life come to the young people in the present day. It is the parents who slave, who are ready to cut themselves up into pieces to please their offspring, and after all—well, everything is taken without a thank-you.'

Hitherto, the father and the son had so little understood each other that there had been a sort of fear—unacknowledged on the part of Reuben—always between them.

The orthography of the father's letters had

been somewhat extraordinary. And now that he counted on displaying the fields and the timber which he had always coveted to his son, he was conscious of being constrained and uncomfortable. He had been revolving many thoughts—very earthy and entirely unsentimental—in his head, and felt that now he had broken ground it would be his duty to go through with them. He had not been able to shake off his reserve for many a long day, and it would be something to be able to throw off the mask a little in the presence of his own flesh and blood. His spirits were scarcely equal to the occasion, and yet he administered a thumping blow in the mid-chest to his son, at which Godfrey did not stagger, though he looked as if he could have dispensed with it.

'Yes, it'll all belong to you,' he said, 'thanks to what I have done for you—a good part of the moor, with the cottages as far as you can see—you can cut down the trees if you like; you can leave your mark on it, anyhow.'

There was an odd expression in the young man's face as he looked curiously at his father,

with a significantly humorous curl of the somewhat too flexuous lips.

'I wonder where the right ends? If I were to burn down the cottages, for instance, I suppose it would not exactly be legal?'

Again Reuben did not follow him. He was thinking,

'What a good thing it is that he should take to early-rising, a virtue,'—as he added to himself—'in which many of those Oxford chaps are wretchedly deficient.'

But Godfrey's spirits sank as his father's rose, and on the following morning his usual languor had gained on him. He had not sufficient energy to turn out of bed. Nature's normal school of sentiment, the family, seemed to be, like other things, a failure. It is a consequence of our rapid civilization that the younger generation should in many cases outstep the elder, and that the sons should be keenly conscious of the ignorance of the fathers. And it is probably only where a son is sensitive that such a consequence should seem to take the bloom off the flowers of life.

The table was heaped with dainties, and adorned with the brightest silver and the finest linen, when Godfrey made his appearance late at the breakfast-table the next morning. But, with a keen sense of what pleased the lad, Reuben saw that his eyes were directed to a bunch of hothouse flowers whose tender, waxen petals adorned a crystal vase in the centre of the table.

'Ah, that's something better than picking a lot of rubbish out of the hedges as most folks is obliged to do,' said Reuben, sharply. And again he was conscious that he had managed to touch some wrong chord.

It was probably his state of exhilaration which accounted for the lapse in his grammar—an unusual one with Reuben, who generally kept too strict a watch over himself to be guilty of any such solecism. He coughed as if he were aware of the mistake directly he uttered it, and Godfrey hated himself for colouring to the roots of his hair, and becoming suddenly uncomfortably conscious of the presence of two tall footmen who handed the breakfast dishes,

and who seemed to him most unnecessary appendages to the formality of the meal.

'Thanks, I prefer something simpler,' he said, as he declined an elaborate dish prepared by the French cook. 'They are pretty enough,' he said a little coldly, to his father in the same breath, 'but I must say I like the plain things. I don't call them rubbish.'

'As you like a plain egg,' said Reuben, trying to laugh, 'I like it myself.'

'Ah, that's the bore of all these luxuries—we cease to relish them,' muttered Godfrey.

The big room, which was far too big for two men to take their meals in, was a nuisance to him as the rich food was, which Reuben disliked himself, but had had prepared to suit the dainty appetite of his son. Neither could Godfrey praise the pictures which his father had purchased at great cost. The fault might be in the purchaser, but the ambitious historical canvases themselves seemed to prove to the young man how sadly we as a nation had fallen from pictorial art of the highest kind, stringing up our taste to concert pitch, and too

often sounding the keynote while we are unable to get at the tune.

With the furniture it fared no better, and here Godfrey was outspoken.

'I hate machine-made work. Symmetry, yes, but manufacture of things of this sort is destructive—fatal to art. I would give more for a little bit of work, real and true like it was in the good old times, coming out of the carver's brain.'

Reuben began to feel that matters were again going wrong between them.

'You can't make men all o' one build and height,' he tried to say, reassuringly, to himself. He reflected that he could part with the furniture and purchase new, and that he had known it was not 'properly faded-like' all along, whilst his son was brooding over the hideous arsenic greens and magenta dyes, and the wretched decorative sham art of the richer middle class.

What was the matter? Reuben Sellwood did not exactly know. And Godfrey, who had often lamented his loneliness and his want of

any near relations, reproached himself for not taking everything in better part.

It was not his fault that he was artistic, liking everything that was pleasing to the moral rather than the physical palate, and that he had an involuntary recoil from all that was coarse and trifling. His artistic nature could find plenty of food in studying the moors, the river, and the trees. He was easily disgusted at his own amateur efforts in oil or water-colour, and concluded that he had not been endowed with any creative power. But this morning, partly from the want of anything better to do, and partly from the revulsion of feeling which had made him shrink from the unspeakable ugliness of the few gaudy landscapes which had been painted expressly to meet the demand of cotton-spinners at an English manufacturing town, he drew his sketch-book out of his pocket and commenced jotting down pencil notes.

So his father found him a few hours afterwards, with his dreamy eyes turned towards the

shadowy moor, just where the grey turrets of the old Hall could be seen against the softer grey sky, towering over the green woods which nestled beneath it.

'It is beautiful,' said the young man, desisting from his task, but too intent upon the view to notice the slight shadow which flitted across Reuben's face.

'*What* is beautiful?' asked the elder man, a little grudgingly,

'Why, the old Hall, with its picturesque turrets, and its curious mixture of architecture—in every way delightful. Who would think that there could be anything so extraordinarily beautiful in the process of decay, in the many-coloured mosses, and the varying tints on those walls which are mouldering with age.'

'Ah, you would like to possess it?'

The light, which had been growing brighter in the young man's face, faded a little as he continued.

'I can admire without possessing. The place must be full of memories. Think of the

many who must have lived and died in it.'

'A queer reason for liking it. I should like the doghole to belong to you, and then, when it got too narrow for you, I would have you build on it a palace that should rival any place in New York. *I* hate the place,' Reuben continued, thinking of the spindle-legged tables, the worm-eaten oak furniture, and the moth-riddled tapestry, which he had despised as only fit for an old Jew shop on one occasion when he had been admitted to write a business message when the master of Rashleigh had not been at home.

'Well, tastes differ, you see, and, as I am never likely to possess it, we needn't quarrel over it. To my mind, there is something stately in old age,' continued the young man, warming to his topic, and making up his mind not to let his father's odd ways seem repugnant to him, and never to be repelled by his strange words. 'Now, if there is any sort of fetishism which *I* could tolerate, it would be the worship of antiquities. What sort of people

live in that house? Couldn't we get to know them? Are they as antique as their belongings?'

He looked more like the radiant young Apollo which his father wished him to resemble than he had looked at all since he came to Broadmeads as he asked the question, with fun dancing in his eyes.

'What sort of people?' repeated Reuben, with one of those sudden flashes of passion which proved a safety-valve for the pent-up forces within him. 'The man who owns it is a contemptible fool.'

Godfrey arched his brows.

'Then of course you don't know him.—That would be hardly a kind or flattering way in which to speak of a friend,' he added, beneath his breath, deciding that his father might be classified amongst the professors of strong language.

'*I know him!* Ah! just for my own convenience,' answered Reuben, as his son stood motionless and perplexed. 'It is to serve my own purposes that I know him.'

If Reuben's lips were compressed ironically,

and if he indulged in a sarcastic smile, it was an aside to himself. The moustache disguised the mouth, but the look on the upper part of the man's face disconcerted his son. It was as if he strove for speech as he laid his hand on his son's arm, and said at last, as the words came slowly,

'I will tell you a secret; do not talk about it —though, if things go on as they are, it will pretty soon be an open secret,' added Reuben, his voice shaken with some emotion which seemed to be difficult to control. 'You admire the place—in time it will be yours.'

'Good heavens! does there happen to be some curse about me that, immediately I look at anything, I must be told it is mine?' thought Godfrey, half fearful of the detaining arm, the eyes that glittered strangely as they looked into his face, and the breath, ordinarily so quiet, which now came in quick gasps. Aloud he said,

'You must be joking. Do you think I have the evil eye, that I covet everything? I was only admiring the colours of the old building,

which time and weather seem to have arranged with about as much intention as a bird has when it chooses the mosses for its nest. God forbid that I or anyone should wish to pilfer the nest.'

So determined was he to treat the whole thing as a delusion, that Reuben—if he had been ready with a confidence—drew again into his shell.

'We resemble each other very little,' murmured the older man, in disappointment, as he took the younger one to look at the different points of interest in his grounds.

'It is very big, certainly; but that part of it is too new. I like things a little untidy, overgrown—don't you think so?'

'Newness is like youth, my boy—a fault that's mended in time.'

'That's true; but there is the lake, with the overhanging trees, where the wild-flowers grow. I call that really beautiful,' answered Godfrey, cordially.

'The lake—it is a fever-bed. I mean to have it drained.'

'Really! It does not look as if there was anything malarious about it.'

'It used to belong to the Rashleighs, with a ghost's walk, and all the rest of it, and is in a wretched state, like everything that belonged to them. Cleared out it must be, and as quickly as possible. I mean to have a landscape gardener down from London. A large sheet o' clear water, rockeries, and asphalte.'

'Do you mean to say that you would do away with the bulrushes and forget-me-nots, and all those charming grasses?'

'What, the weeds!' cried Reuben in utter astonishment. 'In the conservatory you can have fine growths of——'

'I know—of all sorts of hothouse beauties, from the azalea to the rarest orchis, and they *are* fine ones,' said Godfrey a little sadly, 'they do to look at in a drawing-room or under glass, but do you really think I care for those cultivated beauties so much as for a tangled growth of the good old English wild-flowers? Father, you must get it out of your head that I am at all ambitious. If the doctors tell you

to drain the lake, do so if necessary, but for *my* sake you need not change it. I like it better as it is. And I would respect the feelings of the Rashleighs. It is easier to demolish a family ghost than to restore it.'

Again Reuben bit his lip.

'Acknowledge,' he said, 'that, after all I have done for you, you only despise me for it, and look down upon my way o' doing it.'

'On the contrary, I try to understand what you like.'

CHAPTER V.

LOVE founded on duty—on the natural obligations arising out of the ties of blood and of nature—is not for that reason less necessary to be based on real sympathy and regard. It is a mockery to wear a fair outside show to meet the claims of a social ritual, while the inner harmony of the affections is wanting.

Godfrey found himself thinking something of this kind when the question occurred to him day after day of how it would be possible for him to make his father understand the sort of life which it seemed to him would be tolerable at Broadmeads. Gifted with a strong religious tendency, so that actual negation was distasteful to him, the lad found himself constantly moved

to indignation, bordering on disgust, by the expressions of cynicism which seemed to him little less than blasphemous. There were utterances to which Reuben gave vent only in the presence of his son. How could Godfrey tell his father that he saw and resented the satiric intention with which these speeches were barbed, and that it semed to him occasionally as if the words betrayed inconceivable heartlessness? And how could Reuben tell Godfrey that he considered his self-communings to be ridiculous, and that his son's meaningless scruples roused his risibility.

The men were so divided from each other in spirit that an outsider might have indulged in hilarity at the absurdity, and the utter hopelessness of their attempting to understand one another. Reuben had at times a faint and somewhat sorrowful perception of the fact that there was a far-away look in his son's eyes, as if he were miles away from him. For there were a thousand ideas and sensations familiar to Godfrey at which Reuben would have sneered had he attempted to speak of them.

As to the older man's own religion, Fichte might have said of it, *das gar nicht existirte*. But though he prided himself on the possession of a certain number of ideas to which he adhered with the tenacity of a genius in business—driven like hard nails into his granite head—he was secretly pleased to feel himself eclipsed by the more brilliant qualities of the youth. It even struck him as quite the proper thing that Godfrey should devote a certain portion of his time to the study of church music. All such fancies would have been antipathetic to Reuben, but then he had an undefined idea that benevolent schemes and religious theories were somehow characteristic of the upper stratum of society, and that to take a part in these unpractical notions would fit the piece of Parian marble which he prided himself on having produced, for taking its place on an upper shelf where it could be regarded with admiration. Yet his pride in the superiority of the article which he had turned out did not make him patient with some of the new and startling opinions on the most burning political

questions of the day, which came naturally to a young combatant fresh from an atmosphere of keen debate.

The older man, who had been almost denationalised by long expatriation, did not trouble himself to fight under any particular political banner, or to help in the solution of any of these questions. Yet he winced when Godfrey exclaimed, one morning,

'Yes, we are of the people. I am proud of belonging to the people. I have a better excuse for loving them and working for them because I belong to them.'

Sheer astonishment seemed to take away Reuben's breath. He stared in utter amazement as his son continued,

'You know I do not care to be a large landowner, but, if I *am* to have responsibilities of this kind by-and-by, the sooner I get some sort of knowledge about farming the better.'

Reuben's face was an utter blank for the next few moments. His jaw dropped as he was slowly taking in the idea, that—whilst he, with all the partiality of a mother, had been bent on

raising his son, and priding himself on his completeness in education, appearance, and demeanour—the lad was determined to depreciate his own market value.

'Humbug,' he said, impatiently; 'they are some o' them—these others—born in the mud and doomed to live in the mud—like reptiles as relish the shiny ooze and can't wriggle their tails out o' it. But *you*—to talk like that—why, I slaved and toiled for you or ever you were born—and you to talk of yourself as if you were a common farmer.'

'Ah, I have no doubt. One can see that some strong desire must have acted upon you to make you work with a dozen times the energy of the average man. The energy was admirable—I envy it. But I reproach myself for letting you work in such a way for me.'

'Why not? there are two classes of chaps—the chaps who work and the chaps who don't work, but just sit down and sun themselves like kings. I always intended ye to belong to the idle uns.'

'Thanks,' said Godfrey, repressing his in-

clination to betray his scorn. (It seemed to him impossible to conceive anything much more prosaic or contemptible than the *rôle* which his father had so kindly assigned to him.) 'I fear the toiling has hitherto been on one side. I was just telling you that I reproached myself for leaving St. Anne's in something very like ill-favour, because I had done none of the things which were expected of me——'

'A fact to be proud of,' said Reuben, slapping him on the back. 'I sent you there to be amongst gentlemen, not to be drenched with learning. A vicious thing that cramming—your Shakespeare and Burns didn't cram. Why, the ancients were for drawing out a man, and the moderns all for putting into him. I heard that sayin' when I was a boy, but I had precious little Greek and Latin to spoil my English.'

'That's true. I was going on to say that I didn't take a sufficiently good degree to go to the Bar, and I should not like the responsibility of being a doctor, but that—I ought not to lie quite fallow, and leave you all the laurels. It strikes me that I might do something to help

you in business which you leave to stewards. Other men have taken up the vexed question of how to help the working classes.'

'As how?' demanded Reuben, lapsing into the vernacular.

'Well, you tell me I shall probably be a landed proprietor some day.'

'A precious large one,' answered Reuben, with glittering eyes.

'A landed proprietor should know something of agricultural progress. He should have a scientific training which even now it may be possible for me to get. Sometimes I think that if we had consulted over this before, if I had not been too young to properly understand it, we should both have decided that the university was not exactly the place for me to gain my experience. Why, look at the amount of probation which is required for either of the learned professions, and yet, of all human occupations, the one that stands most in need of the safeguards of training and skill is that of tilling the ground and feeding cattle.'

He did not intend his sentence to end in

bathos, as he felt it had; nor that his father should stand stock still and look at him as if he were a fit inmate for a lunatic asylum. In default of any other answer, Reuben Sellwood began to laugh.

'Stick to your club, my boy, and your music and kickshaws. Some of us were born to be the working-bees, and the rest to be worked for and sit quiet.'

'The club may be all very well in its way; I am for the free expression and ventilation of opinion,' muttered Godfrey to himself, as a vision floated before his eyes of the highly respectable Torringmoor club to which he had just been duly elected, with all its wonderfully fine decorations, and the newspapers—dailies, weeklies, and monthlies—with what they said repeated in a heavier way by the quarterlies. 'I should like to have a free library in Torringmoor, and a lecture-room for working-men,' he said, aloud; 'the sooner we get them the better.'

It is doubtful what Reuben's answer might have been, for at that moment the conversa-

tion was interrupted by cries of distress, and at a little distance one of the gardeners could be seen, apparently out of breath, and dragging a terror-stricken, ragged urchin, who had been trespassing on the property, and who held something huddled up in a basket close to his face.

The boy was followed by a tiny, round-eyed, wide-mouthed girl, who trotted after him as rapidly as her legs could carry her, and who was howling as loudly as her lungs would allow her to howl. Both children had a wretched, ill-fed appearance, with shrivelled skins and thin limbs, instead of being healthy country children.

'I tell my gardeners to frighten the brats when they find 'em trespassing here,' said Reuben, in explanation to Godfrey, to whom the sight seemed to have given a shock, as if he were roused out of his usual listlessness by a discord which came into sharp collision with his theories about the future, and his dream-world.

'I thought I understood you to say,' he fal-

tered, in a low voice, as he placed his hand on his father's arm, 'that—this place would belong to me—some day?'

'Well, what of that?'

'It's nonsense about the place really belonging to me, if the poor can have no right of way in it. And look—he has been filling his basket with nothing but a few harmless flowers; perhaps there is a sick mother at home, and he wants to cheer her with them. It is not such a very terrible offence.'

A flash of expression lit Reuben's usually impassive face, which was gone as instantly as it appeared. Was it a revelation of something concealed even from his son—the same 'something' which made Godfrey often wonder why a chance word or look should make his father fire-up when there seemed to be nothing to offend him?

'Eh?' he asked, as if to gain time to cover his confusion, and conscious of the altered tone in his own voice. 'I told the gardeners to make an exception if ever a poor brat wanted a flower. Eh? but don't you think I am a

d—d fool to be so weak about flowers? There were folks in my day who would have belaboured that young un till he could scarcely stand—it was scant mercy *then*. All they wanted was to rid the world of such vermin, and then pretend they had performed a service to humanity. I knew a boy once—' he commenced, looking before him as if he had forgotten the presence of his son. And then he suddenly pulled himself up, as if he had changed his mind about repeating a story.

'What were you going to tell me? You knew a boy once—?' said Godfrey, after a pause, in a puzzled undertone.

'Nothing. I shouldn't think of boring you with an idle story. Tales do for old women,' he said, looking after the retreating child, who was making good his escape.

'Ah, to be sure,' answered his son, with that wideness of assent which relieved him from the necessity of pressing for further details. He stood stroking his upper lip, deep in thought, while he watched his father's face with a

curious mixture of fanciful speculation—consisting at once of attraction and repulsion, fear and pity, trust and distrust—and the sense of something like a shadow falling on him as he stood in the sunlight.

He drew a long breath as he asked himself,

'What could the antecedents have been which led to that expression on Reuben's face, something like the look of a fag turned into a bully?'

It was true that there was a widening gulf of silence and unsociability opening more and more between them. Reuben's secrets, whatever they might be, were locked and double-locked in his own breast, and Godfrey had no cabalistic spell.

Neither of the two was communicative. Reuben gave instructions to the gardeners to let the child be free of the place and help himself to a few flowers, much to the astonishment of the gardeners; and Godfrey, knowing nothing of Reuben's queer fit of indulgence,

made a point of finding out the name of the boy and visiting him at his own cottage to give him a present of money. It was Godfrey's first experience of the miserable state of the peasantry in that part of ——shire. But he became less interested in mediæval details and in sketching the scenery of the neighbourhood and the artistic contours of the Hall, now that he awoke to the fact of Reuben's tyranny.

'If flunkeydom is worse than swelldom, surely plutocracy is more insufferable than aristocracy,' thought the young man, with a shiver to himself.

For many of his father's notions were absurd and superannuated, and yet—as familiarity without much expansion increased by degrees on either side—it became daily more evident that Reuben could not bear a syllable of contradiction. Though he knew little about politics, he would have liked to have had to settle Ireland or any given number of countries in his own way, but his measures would have been drastic. He was acutely conscious of the deficiencies of those untrained masses of the people, from whom he

boasted he had risen. He adopted a style of conviction on all possible subjects which was galling to the younger and more impulsive mind of his son—a conviction too pronounced for the trimming of practical politics. He had tested his own faculties in a varied school, and had a contempt for those of his neighbours. He had no charitable tolerance for contrary beings, and no rhetorical blandishments to deck the sternness of his views.

'This chap of mine will be riding a hobby to death,' he said, when Godfrey propounded a few of those notions which his father considered to be utterly subversive and destructive to society. 'I don't want to encourage paupers, vaunting their rags and sores, but the men who can raise themselves. If there was any of the right sort of stuff in them, they would cease to be paupers. Wait till you are a public man before you take up these sort of questions.'

'I don't want to be a public man,' laughed Godfrey in reply. 'What is it to be a public man? To run a chance of having your name placarded against a wall and bespattered with

abuse in a daily paper, to have to meet your greatest enemy at a dinner, or hear yourself railed at by your opposite neighbour in a railway carriage. No, I prefer to do things in a smaller way.'

And then he attempted in vain to speak to his father of failing harvests, and the heavy losses of the poorer people.

'There are some landlords who pay more attention to their partridges than their fellowmen, but *you* at least should know better,' he tried to say.

The words had little effect upon Reuben, but unconsciously he was softened. Perhaps it was the effect of Godfrey's violin music, with its infinite variety of passion and pathos, which Reuben had always professed to scorn, but to which he had listened lately, unknown to the performer, in an adjacent room.

Godfrey thought little of his own performance as that of an amateur. But the instrument formed a vent for the passionate artistic fervour which the younger man concealed as a rule from others, and combined with other

ideas of his own which were often unformed. He could scarcely have existed himself without music. But he would have wondered greatly if he could have known that when he sang a favourite song from Handel's 'Samson' his father's attention was singularly arrested.

'Honour and arms scorn such a foe,'

Reuben hummed, in imitation of Godfrey's bass runs and trills, when he was alone,

'Though I could end thee at a blow,
Poor victory!
Vanquish a foe that is half slain,
So mean a triumph I disdain.'

How was it that Reuben could not get this special stanza out of his head! 'Poor victory!' It rang in his ears in the intervals of his sleep. It haunted him when he looked at the turrets of the Hall.

'Honour and arms scorn such a foe,
Poor victory!
To conquer thee,
Or glory in thine overthrow.'

'Ah, I have it,' he said to himself one morning, when, at the sight of a youthful figure in

deep mourning flitting up the avenue of beech trees which led into Rashleigh Park, a whimsical solution occurred to him of his difficulty. 'I shall triumph still—and yet the sleeping dogs will be let lie.'

CHAPTER VI.

In process of time the two neighbours became acquainted. The acquaintance was in fact inevitable as their grounds adjoined each other, and it became necessary that certain little matters should be settled which were from time to time cropping up, and which Sir Ralph was not rich enough to be able to entrust, as he otherwise might have done, to the management of a solicitor.

There was a picturesque little wooden bridge joining the two estates, which Reuben with characteristic effrontery had ordered to be pulled down. The estates still remained 'two' in the eyes of the world, especially as Reuben had commenced building the wall which he had

threatened, regardless of the fact that the noise was annoying to the baronet. Yet it was an open secret that the large number of mortgages on the Rashleigh demesne had somehow fallen into the hands of the interloper who had purchased the place vulgarly called Broadmeads, with a Philistine smack about its very title.

But a portion of the old property was still intact. And, when it became a nice question of law as to whether the new-comer could claim a right of way for himself and for his people over the somewhat venerable bridge, it seemed the easiest way of settling the matter to order the bridge—that stood on the portion of ground which Reuben had purchased, but which his servants might not use without so much discord—to be pulled down. It was removed in the dead of the night by Reuben's orders, and there were tears of resentment and fury in the baronet's eyes as he recognised his inability to punish the offender. For, whenever it was possible to adopt a high-handed course, the owner of Broadmeads did so. A direct appeal

to him would have been useless, had the baronet been able to conquer his pride sufficiently to make it.

Yet in the course of the dispute, which was conducted with as little outward show of antagonism as possible, the two men met for the first time, Sir Ralph, with circles round his eyes and wrinkles caused by anxiety, apparently the elder of the two.

He—having led a retired life, and having thought it right, early in his career, to make a sort of protest by relenquishing the hunting-field and other healthful pursuits of which his father had been so fond—had become more or less a valetudinarian. His aquiline-featured, clean-shaven face was never free from the pallor of sickliness, and he looked with some secret envy at the better braced and more muscular frame of the stranger. Ralph—who was unsocial even to people of his own rank, and who was accustomed to look down on anything which took the form of exchange and barter—in his heart cursed the fate that obliged him to condescend to have business talks with his

neighbour, or that disturbed the peaceful life in which, previous to the death of his father, he had been more or less successful in keeping disagreeable facts from his recollection.

Sir Ralph was, as the people of Torringmoor expressed it, a 'high-tempered' man. His father had been high-tempered before him, and it was somehow considered that to be high-tempered savoured of aristocracy. The temper, in this case, extended itself even to the beautiful collie-dog which constantly accompanied Sir Ralph, and which had the family habit of barking at people whom his master did not favour. The meeting with such a fellow as Reuben Sellwood—who seemed to be the visible embodiment of all his troubles, and whose very presence interfered with Sir Ralph's sedulous avoidance of anything like exposure of the family vicissitudes which might come before the public—could not fail to be annoying to Ralph.

He had still the house and many acres of fine pasture-land to fall back upon, but the very appearance of this wily neighbour, who had established himself so close to him that he

might continually sting him like a gadfly, was a reminder that a large part of the old property had been sold, and that the mansion which had been named by the ridiculous title of 'Broadmeads'—as if those who built it had gloried in their prosperity—was actually built upon the land which had belonged for centuries to his forefathers. Sir Ralph's proud and distinguished head—well poised on his shoulders—was held a little more stiffly than usual in spite of his delicate health when he met the plebeian.

Reuben laughed in his sleeve. What did the other man's petty pretences signify? Plebeian as he was, he had already become his creditor. He already possessed three quarters of the land which had originally been owned by the Rashleighs, and he had sworn to become possessor of the other quarter.

The interview was an amusing one. It was a case of Greek meeting Greek. If Sir Ralph was proud, his antagonist was equally so, and, though it was easy to condemn the latter as a 'born cad,' it appeared that cads were no more free than aristocrats from the 'glorious fault of

angels and of gods.' It would have been better policy for Sir Ralph to restrain that 'high temper' which was reputed to be an equally glorious heritage handed down to him from a long line of ancestors. He made many, but somewhat ineffectual, efforts to do so. For Reuben's blue eyes were cold as steel, expressing the strength of a will against which the other man's passionate insolence would prove weak as clouds of spray perpetually dashing themselves against an iron coast.

He spoke little, availing himself on these occasions of a certain number of formulas which he had become accustomed to repeat. He uttered them in a deep voice, with a careful, monotonous intonation, guarding against too great a freedom of speech, and keeping his adversary at a distance.

In every respect Reuben had the best of it. One might have said that he—having become used to restraining his own temper for his own purposes—betrayed more than once by a humorous twinkle of the eye his consciousness that the more irritable baronet was proving, by

this very evident manifestation of the old Adam from which he had sprung, his knowledge that both were, after all, descended from a common stock.

By degrees Sir Ralph grew less irascible as the other proved a skilful strategist. Everything which Reuben answered seemed perfectly natural, except a chance expression to which he gave utterance, as both men stood together in the grounds of Rashleigh Park where their appointment had been made, Sir Ralph being determined on this occasion not to invite the new-comer to walk into his house.

'It used not to have so much moss about it, surely,' Reuben had said, as he gazed at the old grey pile of buildings which looked picturesque and beautiful as in a fairy-tale in the evening light, with its stones stained by lichen and rain into every variety of tint.

'Used not to?' asked Ralph, looking at him sharply. 'I did not know you had ever seen it before.'

'One would think I had seen it before,' answered Reuben, righting himself instantly; 'but

the fact is, since I have come back to the old country, I have had a hankering after old buildings of this sort, and, when you have seen one, it is like seeing a lot of them.'

'Oh! I heard you caught at the adjoining estate directly it was put up to auction. A man of your sort can appreciate the historical interest belonging to places of this sort,' answered Sir Ralph, a little mollified.

Reuben nodded.

'Well, and you have also a geometric eye, and your own theory about natural frontiers; but I shall keep what came to me from my ancestors.'

'It was not my fault; the theory was—I had the best advice—Mr.——'

'I can do without lawyers.'

'I also. Lawyers are not much in my way. I am a square man, and I only get on with people who are square like myself. Peace is the best thing in the world, still to have peace I must first establish my rights,' said Reuben, firmly.

The baronet winced. Here was a man outspoken, but not so vulgar as he had anticipated,

a man who was so uncommunicative that no one knew the full extent of his fortune; a man who had him to a certain extent in his power, but whose actions might be less hard than his threats. Square enough he looked, without the appearance of being fagged-out—whatever he had gone through in his life—with shoulders big enough to carry the Alps, if not the world. Whilst Sir Ralph himself had felt for a long time as if the machine were wearing out, and began to require rest. Might it not be to his interest to conciliate the unknown Atlas?

'It's a fine old place—none better in the country,' he said, with a sigh, and yet with that sort of secret satisfaction which a man always has when he hears a thing praised that is nearest to his heart.

'Humph!' answered Reuben, speaking a little slowly, as if he were well aware that the sting of each of his words would penetrate through the armour in which the aristocrat had encased himself—'requires a lot of money to keep it up, so I've heard say. That's the worst of these old places.'

Sir Ralph drew himself up; but that his sensitive pride had been wounded was proved by his face changing colour. He shut himself in too continually with his books and the old pictures to have any mask of sunburn like that which Reuben had brought from over the seas, to help him to dissemble his emotions.

It was one of Sellwood's maxims to abstain from pushing a triumph to its utmost, and never to gather grapes till they were ripe. But on this occasion the temptation of regularly rousing the temper of the other, who prided himself on his dignity, proved to be too much for him.

And, as if it was pleasant to see that his neighbour winced, he continued,

'You should go over to America or New Zealand, you people whose fortunes in the old country are going to rags. You could lead a patriarchal life there, feeding your sheep and oxen. No come-down in that.'

Sir Ralph's unwholesome-looking complexion was pink like that of a woman at what he supposed to be the coarseness of the taunt. If the

baronet could have given orders to his butler (one man-servant with that title—a sort of survival of grandeur—had sufficed since Sir George's death to clean the boots, and do work of all sorts except that which fell to the coachman and gardener) to kick the fellow out of his grounds, his rage would scarcely have been satisfied. But, in the midst of his ire, he was forced to remember that he was in this wretch's power, and that to be summoned by him for assault, to say nothing of worse possibilities, would not improve matters with the people at Torringmoor. He made a feeble attempt at meeting him with what he supposed to be his own weapons, and said, with an unamiable smile,

'Certainly—no come-down in that, if, as report says, Torringmoor ought to be pleased to acknowledge that—that you——'

'I know that all sorts of reports are about, but by what right, sir,' asked Reuben, apparently not discomposed—for, to do him justice, he had intended no allusion to injure Sir Ralph's self-respect—'by what right do people meddle with what I do not care to reveal?'

'And by what right,' roared the baronet, 'do people venture to discuss my private affairs. You and your financial successes are nothing to me. It is a sheer piece of impertinence for anyone to venture to allude to my difficulties.'

Again the mask of sunburn, with which kindly Nature still veiled Reuben's countenance, stood him in good stead, as, making a greater effort to conceal the testiness which might otherwise have betrayed itself in his voice, he answered, with a shrug,

'Ah, as to that, I meant to make a suggestion which might stand you in good stead. I thought with the free air around us we might talk like men. Prejudices you must have—you have a lot of them, no doubt—but my right is as clear as possible, and I might have been able to put something before you which would have been to your advantage, still——'

He broke off with a meaning shrug, as if—though it was about the longest speech which he had been known to make since he came to Broadmeads—it was not in his power to make it longer.

The shrug, however, was better than rhetoric, and the manner in which he turned on his heel, leaving the fuming baronet to admit that he had made a fool of himself, more eloquent still.

'So the jackass thought I was going to pour out the story of my life into his long ears,' he chuckled to himself, as he reached his own grounds, 'not so fast; perhaps, when our interests are identical, he may hear a good deal which will make his ass's ears tingle.'

CHAPTER VII.

JUNE roses were blowing on the walls of the cottages at Torringmoor. Tall white lilies with golden centres and waxen petals were growing in the cottage gardens, in singular contrast with the blazing ribbon-like adornment of the bedding-out system which had been adopted in the conventional flower-beds at Broadmeads. Whilst beyond on the blue moor the river rippled merrily over the mossy stones. Cattle were grazing in the lowlands, and labourers were slouching home from their work in the evening light, as Reuben—who in his secret heart cared no more than Godfrey for the buhl cabinets, inlaid tables, tall mirrors, and elaborate cur-

tains with which the upholsterer had told him it was proper to adorn his new house—crept out into the lanes and fields which surrounded his park.

The sun was setting in clouds of purple and amethyst as Reuben left behind him the great iron gates. Absorbed in his own thoughts, and feeling no necessity when he found himself alone for keeping up that appearance of stolidity which he did not generally allow himself to drop even in the presence of his son, the man hurried along, his head bent upon his shoulders, and his eyes cast down. Now and then he glanced at the wild flowers, which seemed mysteriously to bring back the dead past, and to be associated in an odd way with that which he tried to think was the triumphant and prosperous present. There was the 'gypsy rose,' the 'ragged robin,' the 'clematis,' the 'moon daisy,' the 'monkshood,' and there the blossoms were just coming into bud which he remembered used to be vulgarly called 'kiss-me-quick.' It was astonishing how much in his secret heart he agreed with his son in preferring these simple

things with the good old-fashioned names to all the wonders accomplished by horticultural art which he had left behind him at Broadmeads.

The sunset, though beautiful in colour, had been stormy, and now the clouds increased and rain was threatening. The wind began to blow coldly over the desolate moor, but the wind was not more bitter than his own miserable thoughts, much as he was inclined to take praise to himself for the new scheme suggested to him by Handel's music—a compromise which would still allow him to keep up the unforgiving spirit that could not dwell with love. He was bitter at the acknowledgment which he was compelled to make to himself, that regions and regions of separate existence—with ideas that he could not fathom and motives which he had no means of proving—lay between him and the only creature on earth for whom he cared.

He was inclined to curse the fate which brought his boy no nearer to him in reality—for, though the lad might prove too dutiful to leave him, there was always an uncomfortable gulf between them. It did not occur to him to

reflect that an abyss of black nothingness, from which he might shrink back appalled could it be revealed to him, lay yet between his own spirit and that of the Eternal Father. Strange thoughts were stirring in him, born possibly of that music which reveals yearnings so little understood in the hearts of the worst of us. And Reuben did not consider himself by any means the worst. He prided himself on his heroic endurance, on the fact that through a course of years he had grown a hard skin over wounds on which, at Godfrey's age, he would not have been able to endure a touch. Misfortune had been to him, as it is to many of us, no sweetener of the temper. He had passed through terrible suffering—all the more terrible that it had been quiet; but it had left its mark upon him. Few would have guessed that he had been through any ordeal. The people who met him in an ordinary way respected him as a reticent, but keen, business man, whose opinion on many subjects might be valuable, but credited him with no sentiment beyond a recollection of his adventures.

'I care about as much for the lot of 'em as I cared about the opossums,' he said, with a bitter laugh, when he met any of these people, telling himself for the hundredth time that he hated his own kind, and that the exception in Godfrey's case was because the boy was all his own—flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone—and yet, by some cruel trick of Fate, in heart and brain divided from him.

'I'll meet Sir Ralph in his own way; I couldn't propose to him the other thing. After all, perhaps it 'ud be, as the music said, a poorish victory,' he thought, as he found his way, as if by instinct in the fading light, to the path over the heath which led to Torringmoor.

Much of the way was bare and lonely, with no stars to illumine it, and only a vaporous, watery-looking moon gazing down upon him, with pale, cold face, as he sauntered on. He loitered once by the river, where the perfume of the meadow-sweet and the penny-royal seemed to bring back some of those recollections which are so strangely associated with the sense of smell. And then, with a muttered

curse at his own absurdity, he hurried on till he came to a little ruined cottage closely adjoining the moor, and not more than a mile from the gates of his estate. A funny old cottage, which was a very unenlivening sight, naked and miserable, but with traces of former occupation still to be seen in a poor little iron gate which swung open by the ruined wall, and was half eaten through with rust. More than one visitor to Torringmoor had asked why they did not pull it down, and begin building on the site a line of villas—as had been proposed by one of the more stirring inhabitants of the place. But there it stood, windowless and doorless, with the four winds of heaven blowing through its broken thatch, and birds building their nests in one corner of the broken chimney.

A town-councillor who was asked to account for this eyesore generally laughed and shrugged his shoulders. If it pleased that lavish gentleman who had come to live at Broadmeads to offer a sum which would almost beggar other people for 'this bit of a ruined barn,' just as

folks were intending to put up the land for auction, it was really, as he answered, 'no business of his;' the new owner of Broadmeads had either lost his head in his covetousness for every spare bit of land which he seemed to make a rule of buying up, or he wished to astonish folks with one of the showy vagaries of a millionaire. All that the Broadmeads Town-Council knew was that one day they received a letter from Reuben Sellwood, saying that, as his son was a 'bit of an amateur artist,' and had a fancy for sketching all sorts of queer places, he would buy up the cottage and the piece of land on which it stood. Of course they asked a 'fancy' price, which Mr. Sellwood readily paid. He never said anything more about it, but the good people of Torringmoor would certainly have thought he was crazed, if they could have known that he came pretty often to gaze at the cranky thing by moonlight.

They would have said, as you, my good, critical reader, will probably say, that it was not consistent with character. But the perfect

consistency of a 'character rôle'—to borrow an expression from our continental neighbours—is somehow the rarest thing in the world. If an outsider can predicate the actions of nine people out of ten, he is likely to be utterly at sea when he comes to the tenth. I do not pretend to moralise on this infinite variety of human nature.

But whatever of tenderness, pathos, sin, or suffering lay in the past history of this man—who had so far succeeded in eradicating from his heart the mystery which lies hid in all of us, that he was classed amongst the most prosaic of the matter-of-fact—welled up in his memory and imagination now. He seemed to hear again the song of the nightingale which had once come to soothe the agony of a weary sufferer on a bed of pain, and must have chanted from some trees that once grew on the very spot on which he stood.

No twitter of birds disturbed the solitude now. It was as quiet as if pains, toils, and passions had never been enacted in it,—quiet as the burying-ground of the poor which Reu-

ben visited as stealthily afterwards, where a mound, no longer distinguishable from those which surrounded it, might have reminded him of the pathetic ending of all heart-burnings, revenges, and sorrows. But Reuben gained nothing from the story of rest which might have been preached to him by that moulder-ing earth. He was thinking again of his son who was so superior to the common ruck of men—he must be careful not to jar on him. But the plan which he had to propose was no cruel one—it was benevolent—it would approve itself to everyone, he told himself, as he returned by the familiar paths past the gorse and the heather, and past the quietly rippling river to the roadside, where the great laurel-trees which he had planted on his own estate, backed by a fir plantation, loomed darkly in the night air.

'There is no time like the present. I shall catch him in now, and if any soul on earth has a right to tackle him, I have,' he had been saying to himself more than once, as he had been walking across the heath.

He had hitherto been too skilful a strategist to intrude himself on Sir Ralph's solitude. But matters had come to a crisis now, and he smiled a little grimly to himself as he walked on a little further, and handed in what he scornfully called his 'nonsensical pasteboard' to the shabbily-dressed butler at Rashleigh Hall. He knew perfectly well that this would be about the time when Sir Ralph would have finished his dinner, and when he would be sitting moodily over his wine—if indeed his circumstances had not compelled him to make a virtue of necessity, and join that teetotal movement which, as Reuben said cynically to himself, was now the cream of the fashion since so many bishops and grandees had joined it.

'Why, he may even run a chance of having his portrait figuring in the most popular reviews, and may take the chair as president at the what-d'ye-call-it—Social Science Congress, and all because he hadn't enough tin to spare for the stocking of his cellar,' chuckled Reuben to himself, as the man-servant went in with his card, knowing perfectly well that—however his

neighbour's intrusion might rouse Sir Ralph's temper—the latter would not dare to refuse himself to him. Had not the baronet been compelled to borrow the offered loan of his money, when creditors had pressed upon him so heavily, that the question of whether he should avail himself of the accommodation or not had been one which no longer brooked weighing in the balance?

The baronet's pride compelled him to allude to the circumstance as he invited in the unwelcome guest, who—in the softened light of the candles which left dark shadows in the great room—could not help admiring the old oak side-board, carved with the arms of the Rashleigh family, and still seeming to tell of former splendours. It was in keeping with the equally old massive chairs, and the spare figure, with its worn face of somewhat ascetic expression, which sat, as Reuben had expected, alone at the head of the frugal board.

Reuben's eyes wandered to the corners of the ancient banqueting-room where there was still the faded tapestry and the damaged old family portraits. The place could have told secrets had it been in a communicative mood. He

had heard descriptions of it by Mrs. Rose, though he had never set foot in it before. What had become of the great china bowls which had been so long in the family, and which had apparently gone the way of all flesh, as if they had made up their minds that they had lived long enough? Had they gone the same way as the grand old clock which one of the Rashleighs was said to have brought from Bruges, with figures which used to come from hidden places and make their obeisances whenever an hour was struck? There was a pretence in the family that the new baronet's greyhound had knocked down many of the articles of *virtu*. Certainly they had vanished one by one, but it would have increased Sir Ralph's iciness, which was worse than his occasional fits of irritability, if Vere herself had dared to hint that he had been compelled to part with them.

This little fiction of maintaining the dignity of the family was perfectly understood by his niece. It kept her reticent, courageous, and accustomed to exert herself, forgetting herself in others, and ready to hide her own great un-

selfishness, which was ever present as a hidden force behind her restrained feelings.

'I was charmed to oblige ye with the loan that ye required,' said Reuben, slowly, after he had gazed his fill, with a nod which contrasted somewhat oddly with the stiff, aristocratic bow.

'Without disobliging yourself?' Sir Ralph said, slowly. 'My friend, if I judge you rightly, you are not the man to do things impulsively. You have some motive for parting with all this money? You are too shrewd a fellow to throw it away.'

Sir Ralph, who had been brooding over the matter for some days, had at least as good a comprehension of Reuben's character as Reuben had himself.

'Oh, a good bargain pleases two people,' answered the latter, in no way abashed; 'I don't see why all this should make any difference 'twixt you and me.'

His perfect self-assurance, and the easy way in which he added, 'I don't see why you and me should quarrel,' acted as a moral stiffener

upon Sir Ralph, who, sitting bolt upright and speaking much as one of Holbein's portraits, if it had been suddenly transformed into life, might be expected to speak, said,

'Let us come to business? Do you propose to pay yourself by taking my whole estate?'

'To put it plainly, I don't see why our interests shouldn't run together.'

Sir Ralph raised his eyebrows. To his way of thinking, there was but one line of demarcation in the world which signified very much —that between the man who had a grandfather and the man who had none. Now, so far as he had heard, the impudent creditor who had forced himself into his presence had not even a father, and yet he had the cool insolence to speak of their interests as identical. Sir Ralph was a little afraid of the self-made man, nevertheless. Was he not in his power? And, though the sherry was poor enough which stood before him on the table, he was so far from openly resenting Reuben's speech that he said,

'A glass of wine with you——' adhering to an old custom.

'In real truth, I'm downright sorry for ye,' said Reuben, a few moments afterwards, balancing the wine-glass, which he forced himself by way of compliment to empty, between his fingers, 'but you *couldn't* tide over such difficulties. It wasn't *you* who got into them, but you found them made for you—that's the long and short of it.'

'The situation was created for me,' answered Sir Ralph, with a chilling smile.

It was evident that he was now fairly subdued in temper, and saw that there was nothing to be gained by recrimination.

'Yes, and I don't see how you can flounder out o' it. It'll take a deal to build up the fortunes of this house, but you will not find me a hard-fisted creditor. Indeed, on one consideration—but I don't know how exactly to expound it to ye.'

'Proceed,' said the baronet, haughtily, 'I am ready to listen.'

'But I may shock your prejudices.'

'Prejudices cost us dear. Poor people have no business with them.'

'You have old-fashioned opinions.'

'Do you think so? You may be mistaken, and opinions are not prejudices.'

'According to my way of thinking, folks must move a little bit with the times. If you don't keep pace with them, you'll be left out o' the running.'

'Ah, that's *your* system of ethics. I admit the altered conditions,' said Sir Ralph, growing if possible more erect and poker-like, as he looked opposite at the rich man sitting on his easiest chair, boasting of his prospects, and repeating his crude theories. The state of things at Rashleigh must be altered indeed, or else it must all be a hideous nightmare.

'Good!'

Reuben's eyes gleamed. He was evidently labouring under some excitement which made his hand a little unsteady and his breathing audible.

'Good,' he repeated. 'I see it is possible we may agree better than I expected. Our interests, as I said, may end by being the same. I have money enough for both.'

'If you have, you needn't brag about it,' muttered Sir Ralph, a little huffily.

'No, I say share and share alike. I don't want to harm ye. Why shouldn't we be friends? He dropped his voice—his agitation had evidently increased. 'On *one* consideration it is possible I may defer all claim.'

'And that?' said the baronet, whose heart was beating more loudly than he cared to admit.

'You have a niece like a Hebe' (Reuben pronounced it Heeb). 'Now, why shouldn't she become the so-called "angel" which every young woman may be to a young fellow fond o' poetry, just fresh from his University trainin', and why shouldn't the two together promise to look after the interests of your own little lass? Keep the estate together and share alike, no one the wiser.'

The absolute pain which could no longer be concealed made it impossible for Sir Ralph to answer, as the full tide of recollection—of the ignominy of poverty, and the humiliation to which this niece, confided to his care in infancy, had already been subjected—rushed back upon

him. He waved the impudent intruder into silence with a gesture that seemed to say, 'Why do you profane my private griefs?'

But Reuben's ardour to propound his scheme and his consciousness that he himself had emerged from social twilight, and had passed—not only that shadowy line which, in the eyes of the Torringmoor folk, divided the retail trader from the wholesale merchant, but the further line of demarcation which separated the wholesale merchant from the large capitalist—made him answer, with equal pride,

'And if I mention that I have a son, it will be fair to say that he in no way resembles myself, but is in appearance, education, breeding—in everything of which you could think—a fit match for the daughter of a queen.'

The reserve and hauteur of the one man had been rivalled by the high tone adopted by the other. Yet Sir Ralph's hard breathing, and the way in which he stared at the speaker, seemed to intimate that Reuben had committed an offence for which it would be in vain to essay reparation. The drops of perspiration stood in

beads upon the baronet's forehead. He had no great appreciation of the finer qualities of Vere's character, but as she was still his niece, and the daughter of the elder brother of the house, it had been an offence to mention her name in a talk like this. To think that the sight of Vere should have touched the heart of an old mysogynist, for Reuben was a professed woman-hater, was in itself insufferable to him. Why had he not managed to send the girl away from home: why should he be compelled to submit to such an indignity?

'Impossible,' he said, when he was able to speak. 'You do not even know my niece.'

'Oh, don't trouble about that,' answered Reuben, with a vague sense of disappointment at the cold scrutiny of the baronet's gaze. 'I've heerd a lot o' the lass, and ha' had more than one peep at her, and it 'ud go against me if she was to be left unprovided-for.'

And he rubbed his hands together with a pleasant glow of generosity which was quite a new sensation to him.

Sir Ralph groaned. It was as if a bombshell

had fallen at his feet. He had preserved his dignity sufficiently to prevent his start from being noticeable. But he was no longer erect and poker-like. His cheeks and brow were flushed.

'Disreputable!' he muttered, beneath his breath. And then, clutching his chair with both his hands, he smiled blandly into Reuben's face, recognising that the more he betrayed his mortification or showed any excitement of feeling the calmer would his inquisitor become, and the more inexorable in tightening the torture-screw.

'You had better think of it,' he said, as he rose to leave. It seemed to him that the advantage of the proposal might be supposed to be on *his* side.

'Give me some days for reflection—the thing strikes me as so extraordinary—so foreign to our English customs. I think you have no right to propose anything of the kind. Why bring my niece's name into the question?'

'I wish her nothing but good. I wouldn't hurt a hair of her pretty head if it were ever so.

It's not as if she'd have to marry my lad straight off the reel. Give 'em time, that's what I say; it's my belief they were made for each other.'

Sir Ralph winced as if from a physical blow, and then remembered that ruin and misery, not to say starvation and humiliation, seemed to stare him in the face, and that the critical emergency could no longer be tided over.

'If only the man were a gentleman, and not such a horrible cad.'

He shook hands with him, nevertheless, trying to master the indignation and astonishment which were still betrayed by his eyes.

'It means thousands—I might almost say millions. There are folk who talk against money—braying like asses a meaningless bray—when they forget all that it has done to benefit the human race. It means in this case that I shall be set free from the curse of my wearing anxieties—free to feel the pure air of heaven blowing round me again without any of those carking cares,' he said to himself, sitting still for hours after Reuben had left him.

Whilst Mr. Sellwood—well pleased with his evening's work, and with unruffled features which told of nothing that had taken place—had endured to be dismissed with a royal 'Leave me,' was walking home with a conviction that his banishment could not last long.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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